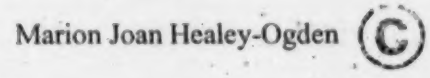
University of Alberta

The Experience of Well-Being: Uncovering the Mystery

by

Marion Joan Healey-Ogden 

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Abstract

The experience of well-being is cloaked in mystery, showing itself during times of health and illness. This mystery and the common exchange of the words wellness, well-being, and health called forth the question: What is the nature of the lived experience of well-being? Hermeneutic phenomenology was the research approach taken with a dynamic interplay among van Manen's (1997) six research activities. Martin Heidegger's and Hans Georg Gadamer's phenomenological traditions underpinned this research. The data included taped interviews of five people who described their experiences of well-being, along with contributions from the humanities, a range of arts, and anecdotal accounts.

This research showed that well-being is stillness, as in being thoughtful, and as having soulful strength and a rhythmic flow. Well-being involves letting go to embrace the mystery of well-being. It is experienced in the tension, in the space of difference where a rhythmic interchange occurs as in breathing, and where harmony and balance lie at its foundation. Well-being requires a personal drive to exist; it is not experienced through purposeful means. It is experienced in a self-forgetful way, in the free space where life unfolds and where people come to see their worlds differently. The lived experience of well-being is interwoven with perceiving one's identity which evokes feelings of orientation and of knowing oneself more fully. It presents with fluctuating qualities and is expressed in a newfound quietude of voice. People's orientation and identification reflect dwelling and building on their journeys to come home to themselves.

Play space, creative space, nature's space, and spiritual space are significant in one's experience of well-being that reaches toward the depth of the human condition. The people who were exemplars in this study engaged in the world in such a way as to become their playing, singing, gardening, and communing. The men and women embraced vulnerability and relationships in becoming one with the world in the conjoined space between their inner and outer worlds. The results of this research can be applied to nursing, thereby suggesting that well-being holds a significant place within nursing practice for clients and for nurses.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my entire family who has encouraged me through my ongoing years of education. In particular, I raise my husband, Gerry, to a most honoured position. He has been supportive of my PhD journey from the moment that I first mentioned the idea of doctoral studies to him on the eve of my MEd defense. Our children, Kyle and Angela, continuously inquired about my progress and anticipated my completion. My parents and in-laws fully supported me, even if it meant that at times I was unable to visit. I will be eternally grateful to each of them.

This degree may have my name attached to it but, in reality, it reflects the sacrifices that my family has made while I completed this work. It also reflects the contributions they have made, for example in proofreading, or in listening to me as I attempted to share my deep interest in well-being, or in clarifying my thoughts about this phenomenon. In my mind, they deserve a medal.

Acknowledgments

Achieving my PhD has been a long journey. I extend my sincere thank-you to my Supervisor, Dr. Wendy Austin, who has been by my side every step of the way. She kindly and gently nudged me to explore the world of well-being that opened to me each time I listened to people's stories or read descriptions of this phenomenon. At times I thought that this dissertation may never be completed because of the extremely elusive nature of the experience of well-being. Gradually, as I came to trust my work and the evolving nature of phenomenology, this lived experience began to show itself in a variety of ways. Dr. Austin's steady encouragement and exceptional knowledge of phenomenology kept me going. In particular, her knowledge of the humanities became a guide for me to listen for and see the experience of well-being within the broad world of the arts. As my knowledge of well-being grew, so did my awareness and description of this experience.

I offer my thank-you and appreciation to my entire committee. Dr. Brenda Cameron believed in my abilities throughout every step of my PhD. She helped me extend my writing to ensure that I captured particular aspects of this experience. Dr. Max van Manen's publications were foundational for my writing and his thoughtful feedback helped me move ever-closer to revealing this phenomenon. Dr. Joanne Olson and Dr. Marion Allen raised key questions for me to consider as I planned this research. Thank-you, too, to Dr. Linda Ogilvie who joined the committee for my defence and to the External Examiner, Dr. Francine Hultgren from the University of Maryland. The entire examining committee brought richness to the defence

discussion that left me with the desire to move this work forward. I will always remember the committee's phenomenological nod.

My friends and colleagues have stood by me throughout my PhD work. I extend a deep thank-you to them for their continuous support and for believing in me. I could not have completed this degree without their unwavering encouragement.

In particular, I thank the men and women who volunteered to be interviewed for this research. Their stories gave meaning to the lived nature of well-being. They shared their time and experiences in a most open and sincere manner that brought the phenomenon of well-being to life. I am sincerely grateful for their participation in this research. Because of their descriptions, I have come to understand well-being in depth as a different phenomenon than wellness or health.

At this time I acknowledge and thank Access Copyright and, thereby, the publishers of the poems that I included, for granting permission for me to use various works in my dissertation. The authors' writings show well-being in special places within peoples' lives. Their writing became windows through which I saw aspects of the mystery of this experience and through which I could better understand the experiences of the five people I interviewed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF WELL-BEING

Well-being. This phenomenon is showing itself as being distinct from health and illness and existing within a myriad of experiences. As I embarked on this research to understand the lived experience of this phenomenon, I wondered if a different term would emerge to take the place of the word, well-being. Throughout my writing, I remained open to the possibility that another word, words, phrase, or phrases might take its place. None did. The closest change came when one of the people I interviewed called well-being "peace and contentment" as a way to describe this phenomenon, then continued to use the word well-being throughout our discussion.

During the early phase of my journey to understand well-being, I became increasingly aware that this phenomenon is very elusive. I wondered if this elusiveness may be so, in part, because of an apparent dissonance between the traditional medical model of health and healing patterned after Cartesian thinking that separates body, mind, soul, and spirit (Reed, 1998) and the holistic model of health and healing as a balance between body, mind, and spirit (Cobb, 1998; Neuberger, 1998). I was searching to understand the unique meaning of well-being that lies at the depth of human experience, far removed from technical advances that focus on combating disease and on lists of illness prevention or wellness strategies. Discussions of illness experiences and the effect of well-being in one's life are windows through which I viewed the phenomenon of well-being. Slowly, as I searched the literature and listened to people's experiences, my ability to recognize aspects of this phenomenon began to sharpen and, gradually, whole descriptions came into view. The challenge for me was

to become attuned to themes that lay hidden within the data. At times I was challenged to literally feel well-being in others' experiences and within myself.

Upon reflection, I realize that I began this journey of discovery in my childhood, during times that I felt at peace and contented while playing or while in the company of friends. It was, however, when I came face-to-face with being ill as an adolescent that I became most aware of a profound sense of well-being. I describe my illness experience in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. For now, I will focus on this apparent paradox: How could I feel well and, at the same time, be ill? How is it that well-being showed up for me in illness? I could not find clear answers to these questions in the health literature. Instead, others' experiences resonated with my experiences. I recognized the experience of well-being in people's descriptions of their engagement in creative expression amidst life difficulties (Healey-Ogden, 2001; Rockwood, 1999). Glimmers of well-being showed up for me in peoples' descriptions of experiencing soul energy during a variety of life-situations, such as grieving (Tomm, Imbach, Rietjens, Parry, & Liske 1995). I heard the experience of well-being in people's stories of recovery from illness (Barss, 1999; Dossey, 1984). Alternately, I learned about the devastating effects of an absence of well-being during an illness experience (Tomm, et al.). I began to question if, perhaps, the western view of health focuses on health over well-being because health and illness are more easily distinguished from each other, while the very nature of well-being is elusive and requires a special way to become attuned to its essence during times of health and illness.

Coming to This Study

My strong interest in studying the experience of well-being was nurtured over many years of nursing. The personal accounts I heard of well-being, as well as my own experience, did not fit with the dichotomy of health and illness expressed in the health care literature. In a Masters thesis I explored the experience of support during recuperation (Healey-Ogden, 1989). I discovered themes such as the need for people to be in control of their recuperation and the power of hope, of having information, and of receiving permission to struggle in personal ways. Support was revealed as giving possibility to recuperation. Although well-being did not emerge in that study, the participants described experiencing feelings of empowerment from such support, allowing them to move beyond their experiences of illness. In subtle ways that study evoked a phenomenon that resembles aspects of well-being toward which the health and lay literature point (Bateson, 1989; Frank, 1991; Frankl, 1946/1959; Paterson & Zderad, 1976).

That Masters work, plus personal experiences involving the calming and centering influence of creative expression in my life, led me to embark on a second Masters thesis in which I explored women's experiences of engaging in creative expression within the context of significant life events (Healey-Ogden, 2001). Catalysts for this second Masters study were comments made by clients in my counselling practice about engaging in various forms of creativity as a means of moving through and beyond difficult situations. That Masters research pointed toward well-being arising from the women's experiences of harmonious balance in their lives. The more I read and wrote and the more I heard people's lived experiences, the more

well-being was revealed as being different from health and illness. These studies brought to my attention the importance of understanding this phenomenon and drew me toward investigating the everyday lived experience of well-being.

Health, Wellness, Well-Being, and Illness

My personal understanding of health, wellness, and well-being is informed by foundational health literature that gives direction to my nursing practice. The World Health Organization (WHO) (1946) definition of health is commonly used within nursing and health-related work. This definition is: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, p. 1). According to the 2006 website in which the WHO (1946) document was located, there have been no changes in this definition since it was put into effect in 1948. Health and well-being are blended together in this definition, allowing room to consider that (a) the absence of illness or infirmity does not guarantee health and well-being and (b) health and well-being may exist within illness and infirmity. The emerging message emphasizes holism rather than technical expertise (Kearns & Gesler, 1998). In particular, WHO (2001) describes mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (p. 1). This definition unites the individual with the community when describing mental health as underlying well-being (WHO, 2004).

In a document on the mental health of Canadians, Epp (1988) distinguishes optimal mental health from minimal mental health. Epp defines optimal as including "individual, group and environmental factors [that] work together effectively, ensuring

subjective well-being; optimal development and use of mental abilities; achievement of goals consistent with justice; and conditions of fundamental equality" (p. 9). In contrast, minimal factors include "individual, group and environmental factors [that] conflict, producing subjective distress; impairment or underdevelopment of mental abilities; failure to achieve goals; destructive behaviours; and entrenchment of inequalities" (Epp, p. 9). He provides a way to see variability in health that points toward occasions of well-being and toward lack of well-being. Stephens, Dulberg, and Joubert (2000) used secondary data from the 1994/1995 National Population Health Survey (NPHS) in their analysis of the mental health of Canadians. In their report they identified an indicator of mental health, "sense of coherence (SOC), or psychological well-being, [as] refer[ing] to an outlook or enduring attitude whereby life is seen as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful" (p. 119). Stephens et al. showed that well-being is present in mental health although two separate terms emerged in their study. The NPHS data that was used in the analysis separates SOC or psychological well-being from "happiness and interest in life" (p. 119), thereby distinguishing well-being from happiness.

Despite the holistic message about health, and the inclusion of the word well-being in such significant definitions, the phenomenon of well-being is unclear. Kikuchi (2004) pays attention to this discrepancy when she emphasizes that the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) Code of Ethics provides "neither a definition of health nor of well-being" (p. 30). Yet, as Kikuchi states, "In the Code, health is viewed as the absence of disease or infirmity and something more—but [we] are not told what that something more is" (p. 30). The CNA Code of Ethics follows the lead of the WHO

(1946) definition of health and, thereby, perpetuates our lack of understanding of well-being.

Carlyon (1984) writes that, in our western view of disease prevention and health promotion, we have inadvertently created a gap in understanding and in practice. Disease prevention has been equated to health promotion. According to Carlyon, "it is not the purpose of wellness to reduce or prevent risk factors for particular diseases. Instead, it is to 'help well people develop lifestyles that can maintain and enhance that state of well-being'" (p. 28). Although Carlyon does not describe the experience of well-being, nor does he distinguish health promotion from well-being, he acknowledges that work needs to be done to identify health and wellness. Carlyon opens a window to focus on well-being when he cautions that "wellness is, in fact, a euphemism for humankinds' search for its noblest possibilities and for the social arrangements needed for them to flourish. To medicalize this search is to abuse the spirit; it misses the point of being human" (p. 30).

This hermeneutic phenomenological research, therefore, situates the experience of well-being within the possibilities of being human. The something more within health to which Kikuchi (2004) refers, provides beginning direction for this research. I am committed to staying true to the human experience of well-being as it shows itself in people's accounts of their lived experiences.

Significance of This Study in Nursing

The growing number of self-help books on varied aspects of living well may be an indication of the increasing level of people's focus on health. They are seeking answers from the literature, from psychotherapists, including therapists with a nursing

background such as mine, and from physicians regarding anxiety, depression, and other nonpsychotic experiences. Clients in my counselling practice frequently talk about their desire to move beyond particular life difficulties or concerns about coping, toward a more peaceful life. They seldom talk about being healthy, although they frequently talk about being unwell and searching for balance in their lives. The intent of this research is to bring to light the nature of well-being that is hidden beneath and within traditional understandings of this experience and to distinguish well-being from health, illness, and wellness. The potential exists for this study to contribute to nurses' understanding of ways to nurse people toward well-being. It could assist nurses to promote experiences of well-being through their care relationships with people. This study could make a difference in the way nurses come to understand human experiences, including clients' and nurses' own experiences of well-being.

It is common to hear nurses and health care professionals in general talk about their feelings of stress and burnout related to the ongoing demands of their work. According to Gadow (1980) "the nurse who withholds part of the self is unlikely to allow the patient to emerge as a whole" (p. 87). The possibility exists for this research to show ways for nurses and other health professionals to come to experience their own well-being within an increasingly demanding work environment and, in turn, to pay attention to ways in which they could make a difference in the well-being experiences of the general public (Bateson, 1989).

Well-being points toward the being of the person and, in this sense, highlights the wholeness of the person. The nursing literature includes a myriad of discussions on body, mind, and spirit. Watson (1988) states, "The person possesses three spheres of

being—mind, body, and soul—that are influenced by the concept of self. The mind and the emotions are the . . . point of access to the body and soul" (p. 54). Watson's (1985, 1988) nursing theory separates these human dimensions and, at the same time, highlights their impact on each other. In contrast, Newman (1994) describes "disease as expanding consciousness" (p. 23) and states that "it is important to see the human being as unitary and as continuous with the undivided wholeness of the universe" (p. 83). In Newman's nursing theory, the body and mind are viewed as being one entity without paying specific attention to the spirit. Alternately, Roy's (1984) nursing theory considers the person to be "an adaptive system" (p. 22) whereby the sum of parts makes up the whole. Other nursing theories state the sum of parts is more than the whole (Parse, 1981; Rogers, 1970). Viewing the sum of parts as being more than the whole emphasizes the possibility that the lived experience of well-being is more than descriptions of each of the three entities, body, mind, and spirit. This possibility echoes Kikuchi's (2004) reference to the "something more" (p. 30) in health.

Coming to the Research Question

In order to see, hear, and literally feel the experience of well-being, I turned to phenomenological research methodology to assist me to uncover the prereflective aspects of the lived experience of this phenomenon and to describe this something more. Hermeneutic phenomenology involves seeking shared human meaning and it is about coming as close as possible to revealing the mystery of lived experiences, yet being aware that the mystery will never be fully explicated (van Manen, 1997). This approach to research allows me to wonder about the taken-for-granted nature of the lived meaning of well-being and how we experience well-being in our moment-to-

moment everyday existence. It allows me to see this human experience as a way people are in the world (Dreyfus, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), to interpret the meanings embodied in this experience (van Manen), and bring it more clearly into view. Throughout the study, I kept before me, van Manen's advice to remain open to the multitude of ways that a phenomenon will announce itself. I was drawn to ask the research question: What is the nature of the lived experience of well-being? I recognized, too, that as van Manen warns, the question itself might shift during the course of finding an answer.

The use of hermeneutic phenomenology for this research requires that I share relevant aspects of my world and, in particular, that I make apparent my pre-understandings of the experience of well-being. I describe in this work some significant times in my life that have led me to wonder about well-being and its nature. I wove my own background and experiences together with the lived experiences of the men and women I interviewed and with data from a range of sources such as poems, stories, paintings, and anecdotal accounts of lived experience. These varied experiences and expressions of aspects of well-being allowed me to see well-being from various vantage points. On this journey of discovery I moved through ever-deepening layers of understanding. In this work I strive to show the common experience of well-being as it is lived. It has been claimed that qualitative research "can awaken understanding, evoke passion, and shape reflexive and revolutionary practice" (Thorne, 1997, p. 292). My ultimate hope for this research—taking a message from Heidegger as reflected by van Manen (1997)—is to bring answers to the questions: What can this study do with us? (p. 45). What can this study do with nursing?

CHAPTER 2: WELL-BEING EXPRESSED IN THE LITERATURE

When I began to explore the experience of well-being, I discovered the interchangeable use of the words well-being, wellness, and health in the lay literature (Clinebell, 1992; Cowen, 1991). Likewise, in the nursing literature the terms well-being and wellness are commonly used as alternate terms for health (Huch, 1991; Meleis, 1990; Newman, 1994). Although aspects of well-being are apparent within a range of literature, the word well-being is not clearly distinguished from health and wellness and the experience of well-being is not clearly described. As a result of this lack of clarity, the role of well-being in everyday life and in health care remains hidden.

Nursing and Health-Related Literature

I explored the nursing and health-related literature to determine if well-being might show itself as a distinct experience in contrast with health and wellness. The challenge I encountered was the need to untangle the varying perspectives of the meaning of health, wellness, and well-being. In a panel discussion with nurse leaders, Huch (1991) notes Parse's statement that "health is not a state of well-being. It is not something that human's strive for; it is the 'who' that one is" (p. 33). Alternately, Huch quotes Neuman as saying, "I like to think of health as energy . . . . an excess of or a dearth of energy has to do with the wellness versus the illness state" (p. 33). Rogers' perspective is: "The goal of nurses is to participate in the process of people achieving maximum health or well-being within the potential of each individual, family, and group" (Huch, p. 34). These three nurse leaders understand health, wellness, and well-being differently; their comments bring the elusive nature of well-being to attention.

Daaleman, Cobb, and Frey (2001) use the words health and well-being interchangeably throughout their discussion of their focus group study of women's definitions of spirituality. Jensen and Allen (1993) developed a wellness-illness model showing an interrelationship between health, wellness, disease, and illness. For the following definitions of wellness and illness, Jensen and Allen referenced Benner and Wrubel: "Wellness . . . is the subjective experience of health" (p. 221), whereas "illness is viewed as the human experience of disease" (p. 221). In particular, wellness "is perceived as congruence between one's possibilities and one's actual practices and lived meanings" (Jensen & Allen, p. 221). Jensen and Allen continue on to say that "health, disease, wellness, illness are part of the whole, yet distinct" (p. 221). Benner and Wrubel's (1989) definition uses the term, well-being, rather than the term, wellness: "Well-being is defined as congruence between one's possibilities and one's actual practices and lived meanings and based on caring and feeling cared for" (p. 160). They use the term well-being to focus on the lived experience of health and suggest that within this definition is the possibility of engaging in challenges regardless of the nature of the situation. In turn, they honour the immense abilities and powers within the body. Benner and Wrubel explain that well-being involves trusting fully one's body, mind, and spirit to experience possibilities within a caring atmosphere. Caring emerges in the nurse-client relationship. Their study underlines the vital connection between well-being and nursing. Wallace and Appleton (1995) found in their study, "Nursing as the Promotion of Well-Being," that "without exception, participants characterize their nurse-client relationship as the 'link' or 'lifeline' to their potential

well-being" (p. 288). Collectively, these studies indicate that the caring nursing relationship could have a significant impact on the experience of well-being.

Not only are well-being, health, and wellness used inconsistently and interchangeably, a range of literature variably describes the way health and illness are in relation to one another. In *The Enigma of Health*, Gadamer (1996) contrasts health with illness and notes that during illness, or when health is lacking (p. 74), he realizes health's existence. Gadamer discusses the phenomenon of health while he writes about the phenomenon of well-being. "It is the state of being healthy which possesses ontological primacy, that natural condition of life which we term well-being" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 73). He writes that well-being is health that reaches to the human core as if well-being has foundational qualities that health alone may not possess.

Likewise, the nursing literature relates health to illness and, also, speaks to well-being. Watson (1985) supports the view that health and illness are on a continuum, whereas Miller and Thoresen (1999) take a less specific view and state health and illness are related to one another. In turn, Parse (1981) states health and illness are a pattern with little distinction being made between health and illness. In particular, Parse (1981) writes that "disease . . . is not something a person contracts but rather a pattern of man's interrelationship with the world" (p. 41) that is expressed in "rhythmical processes" (p. 41). Continuing with this thought, Newman (1994) describes health and illness as being rhythmically related to each other within a distinguishable pattern. The variable use of terms highlights the need for a deeper understanding of these experiences. To contribute to this understanding, this research on the experience of well-being focuses on its hidden nature.

A variety of literature hints that well-being is distinguishable from that of health and illness. According to Paterson and Zderad (1976) "nursing's concern is not merely with a person's well-being but with his more-being, with helping him become more as humanly possible in his particular life situation" (p. 12). Paterson and Zderad describe health and well-being in similar ways and they pay attention to the possibility of more-being. Their description of more-being is similar to the etymological definition of well-being described later in this chapter, and it includes the fulfillment of possibilities and the potential to exist. The notion of more-being also can be linked to Kikuchi's (2004) reference to health as being something more.

Although Maslow's (1968) classic research, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, does not focus on well-being, his work questions our tendency to consider "surface symptoms" (p. 7) as occurring only in sickness. He writes that the healthy person with symptoms such as anger or who is suffering due to all manner of circumstances may very well be the healthiest of all. Embracing one's difficulties leads a person to human growth and a feeling of fulfillment (Maslow, 1968). It is as if a dichotomy exists in what could be well-being where being and becoming (Maslow, 1968) are inseparable.

Some experiential literature relates illness and alterations in health to well-being (Clinebell, 1992; Dossey, 1984; Miller & Thoresen, 1999), while Frank (1991), Kleinman (1988), and Starck (1992) link suffering with well-being. Frankl (1946/1959) explores the human condition in his own and other's struggle to survive in concentration camps under Hitler's rule. As a psychiatrist living within the atrocities of World War II, he observed human responses to trauma. Those observations led him to emphasize the power of finding meaning and purpose in one's life amidst

commonplace suffering through to unusual suffering such as extreme torture. Frankl did not use the word, well-being; however his struggle to survive a traumatic experience is related to the literature on suffering and also to experiencing moments of peace during this time.

Mairs (1994) describes well-being that surfaced amidst her experience of living with multiple sclerosis (MS). She moves toward experiencing well-being when she shows her struggle to the world, both in openly wearing her brace and in openly speaking and writing about living with MS. Attention is drawn toward this phenomenon that is showing itself during illness experiences when, on first thought, well-being could be considered incongruent with illness. Well-being may emerge when a person comes to trust the illness experience. It is possible that this phenomenon may show up beyond health, in that space of difference that echoes with life when health is missing or when it is not the main focus of attention. If so, is well-being experienced in both health and illness? Perhaps. This exploration can shed light on this mystery. It may be valuable, as well, to explore the aspect of opposites within the occurrence of harmony and balance. Such a search of opposites may reveal understanding of the possibility of well-being occurring when this possibility seems remote.

Health-Related Lay Literature

Commonly, the health-related lay literature gives advice about or outlines activity programs for achieving well-being (Clinebell, 1992; Cowen, 1991). The "how-to" approach misses the opportunity to explore this lived experience. One of the top Best Sellers in the Health and Well-Being category in Chapters Indigo Canada (2006) and in Amazon Canada (2006b) is *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert. The

author is a psychologist who presents a range of research about people's predictive capacity, thereby showing ways to better understand the path along which we stumble as we search for happiness (Gilbert, 2006). The popular series, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, includes many variations that focus on a range of interests (Amazon Canada, 2006a). Each type of book includes stories, poems, and occasional techniques for changing lives for the better. The popularity of these lay books about happiness and feeding the soul, suggest a common desire to understand the nature of human experiences such as health, happiness, and well-being. However, and perhaps because of the difficulty of understanding the experience of well-being, the lay literature skims its essence. Readers are left with only a general sense of this experience and, possibly, a feeling of frustration in being unable to understand the phenomenon of well-being. Answers to questions such as: "What is the nature of well-being?" and "How is well-being experienced?" remain elusive and hidden. This omission in the lay literature and the confusing use of terms may fuel people's intense desire to experience well-being and, in turn, accomplish the opposite. It is becoming apparent in a variety of literature that the experience of well-being arises naturally (Burroughs, 1922; Cather, 1994; Chopin, 1969; Frankl, 1946/1959; Gadamer, 1996; Joyce, 1916/1964; Proust, 1924/1972; Sobel, 1994). Forcing its existence drives well-being underground.

Well-Being as Harmony and Balance

Philosophical discussions commonly attribute the beginning of philosophical thought to Socrates. McKirahan (1994) reviews the roots of philosophic thinking by focusing on the great thinkers of centuries prior to Socrates' time. When discussing opposites, McKirahan states that their presence creates a tension that provides fertile

ground for the possibility of achieving a centered state. He bases his comment on 5th century BC Pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Heraclitus, who explore the mystery of balance, harmony, and conflict within the context of opposites. Heraclitus points to the conflict that is essential to the existence and stability of the whole. He focuses attention on the unity of the whole, and the way that the parts are unique and function separately. The parts are unique integral to the whole and function together within its rhythm (McKirahan).

Gadamer (1996) takes the thought of balance one step further when he states, "It is part of the balancing act of life that one learns to forget what is causing a disturbance" (p. 55), for example when a person is ill. This forgetting is descriptive of "well-being . . . this condition of not noticing, of being unhindered, of being ready for and open to everything" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 73). When discussing the fine balance of life, Gadamer (1996) invites us to think of "health as a state of equilibrium" (p. 113). Health and well-being, then, can be considered experiences of equilibrium when one is involved in the world while forgetting the details of one's involvement and without experiencing dissonance.

Cameron (1993) offers a present-day nursing perspective in her grounded theory study of comfort. She describes patients' engagement in an ongoing process of integrative balancing as a means to promote their comfort along a continuum. Her conclusion emphasizes the importance of recognizing the self-strengthening nature of comfort, the decision-making role regarding one's health and health care, and "the self-determined goals of health and healing" (Cameron, p. 434). Perhaps integrative

balancing to promote levels of comfort has a place in people's experiences of well-being.

Although the varied literature on balance and related concepts provides some insight into the nature of well-being, the confusion that exists within the literature makes understanding difficult. I did not find well-being to be either clearly defined or delineated. Therefore, I turned next to descriptive texts of lived experience in which to search for the nature of well-being.

The Lived Experience of Well-Being

During my exploration of the nursing and health-related literature, I found only two studies related to the lived experience of well-being. A phenomenological study by Parse, Coyne, and Smith (1985) of the lived experience of health, includes the term well-being within the results from one of four groups of subjects. The authors identify three common elements of health conveyed by the one group: "invigorating force, constructing successfulness, and resonating clarity" (Parse et al., p. 31). The expression, "sense of well-being," (Parse et al., p. 31) resides in the latter. In their findings, the authors state that for this particular group of subjects, "resonating clarity" (p. 35) is an expression of harmony that shows itself as a "rhythmical process" (Parse et al., p. 35) expressed in relationships with the world.

The existence of well-being emerges for Coward (1990) in her phenomenological study of women's experiences of self-transcendence while living with advanced breast cancer. Self-transcendence enables the women to find meaning in their lives. In particular Coward states, "Self-transcendence also appeared to be an indicator of more-being . . . . the potential for becoming as much more as is humanly

possible within a particular life situation, is fostered through relationships with others" (p. 168). Coward's term more-being is the same word used by Paterson and Zderad (1976). This limited phenomenological literature provides little additional clarity about the experience of well-being. Considering the literature review to this point as a whole, however, beginning understanding is emerging and themes are beginning to show themselves to me.

Beginning Themes in the Literature

The lay and academic literature includes, for the most part, explorations and explanations that are not phenomenological. A few themes present themselves as possible windows through which to begin to view the lived experience of well-being. Undercurrents of vulnerability, spirituality, and creative expression are appearing in the literature.

Vulnerability

The literature I reviewed highlights vulnerability as playing a part in the way people encounter and live with and through difficulties in their lives. Kleinman (1988) tells the story of "Paddy" who worked as a grief counsellor in a small hospital. His extreme shortness-of-breath highlights the severity of his myocarditis. In a footnote about Paddy's peaceful demeanor that enamoured him to others, Kleinman said:

> Perhaps Paddy meant that his life-threatening disease was like Lear and Cordelia's prison [in Shakespeare's King Lear]. One could be vitally alive and happy in spite of morbidity. Indeed, perhaps he meant more than this: the disease itself could even be part of that vitality and happiness; it could be the source, not just the occasion, for wisdom. (p. 141)

Kleinman shows human vulnerability evident in people's illnesses. Alternately, he shows people's strength emerging from illness experiences. He considers that Paddy's

very illness may be at the heart of the energy in his life, of his happiness, and even of his wisdom. I am left to wonder how people's strength is affected by the ease with which they accept and live within their vulnerability and, too, by the nature of supportive relationships during their experiences of vulnerability. It is possible that people's openness to their vulnerability and to relationships with others is woven into their experiences of well-being. Swinton (2001) points out that health and illness are not mutually exclusive. Thus, he calls into question the literature focusing on a distinction between the two experiences and highlights the possibility that vulnerability can exist in both.

According to van den Berg (1966) the ill person is aware of his or her body in illness when it no longer functions as it does in health. In comparison, the healthy person forgets the functioning of his or her body. Van den Berg raises the question: Which person is more ill, the one who is healthy or the one who is sick? His view lends support for my experience of well-being within an illness experience and pays attention to possible differences between health and well-being. Van den Berg's comments fit, too, with Gadamer's (1996) reference to realizing the existence of health when one is ill. Van den Berg's comments also fit with Heidegger's (1927/1962) view that humans are aware of their worlds whenever there is breakdown, in other words, when their attention is called to the thing that is not functioning as it should. When aspects of the world, including one's body, are in good functioning order, people tend to pay little attention to that functioning. It is possible that the experience of well-being arises from the human tug to focus on one's body during times of breakdown or crisis. A person's spirituality may be the impetus for this natural tug. Perhaps this is so when a person

becomes more attuned to his or her spirituality as crisis looms and as he or she experiences heightened vulnerability.

Spirituality

Some literature highlights the importance of spirituality in people's experiences of well-being (Daaleman, Cobb, & Frey, 2001; Morris, 1996). Olson (2000) states that, during reflection, members of faith communities draw on personal experiences when identifying that health involves more than the "absence of disease" (p. 33). It could be that the notion of more is once again drawing our attention to the experience of well-being. However, there is relative silence about the exploration of the lived experience of well-being in the spirituality literature.

Nakamura (1986) identified Buddhism and Christian thinking as being closest in the belief that suffering is a natural part of life; the challenge for humans is to come to terms with their anxiety rather than to escape this aspect of being human. Although spiritual beliefs can affect people's expectations of suffering, the way a person experiences the apparent crossroads of suffering and of escaping this struggle may affect one's experience of well-being. Levine (1969) points to illness being a time when a person is no longer experiencing synchronicity and wholeness, having lost an aspect of his or her well-being. Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2002) describe the contrasts within spirituality that are "expressed and experienced in stillness and through movement, alone and with others, through silence and with words, with the cognitive mind and through intuitive knowing, through the perspective of our feminine or of our masculine nature" (p. 14). These contrasts mirror the differences between health and illness. Health is equated in a variety of spiritual literature to "wholeness,

shalom, and a total sense of well-being" (Olson, 2000. p. 33). Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) give the example of people's experiences of loneliness giving rise to feelings of emptiness or to a hole in the trunk of their bodies. Perhaps loneliness is akin to illness, suffering, and lack of well-being. Bellingham, Cohen, Jones, and Spaniol (1989) relate the concept of connectedness to spiritual health that they define as "the ability to live in the wholeness of life" (p. 18). More specifically, Bellingham et al. identify three types of connectedness where one is connected to self, others, and "a larger meaning and purpose" (p. 18). Human connectedness with and beyond the self appears to underlie the experience of well-being and, when relationships are missing from people's lives, people may experience feelings of emptiness and diminished well-being. Relationships with self, others, and spirituality form the basis of many descriptions of well-being within the literature. In particular, one's relationship with the arts as in creative expression plays a role in this phenomenon. I will turn to that literature, now.

Creative Expression

Health care professional literature and health-related lay literature with a focus on the arts, are increasingly recognizing that various forms of self-expression are related to health, healing, and the experience of well-being (Healey-Ogden, 2001; Heenan, 2006; McDonagh, 2005). Creative expression is fundamental within various hospital programs (Bouchard, 2005; Lengelle & Serviss, 2001; Rockwood, 1999). For example, the pivotal link between creative expression and healing experiences is the foundation of the Arts in Medicine (AIM) program in Gainsville, Florida (Rockwood). In Canada, a recent Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine (AHHM) program at the University of Alberta (U of A) (Brett-MacLean & Yiu, 2006) is highlighting the

importance of the arts in health care. President Samarasekera of the U of A is paraphrased as saying, "We are indeed looking forward to a creative exchange and dialogue between the arts, humanities, and science that will foster an expanded vision that integrates the body, mind, health and wellness, and goes beyond simply the treatment of disease" (Brett-MacLean & Yiu, p. 7). Creative expression includes all manner of creative forms such as writing, painting, drawing, playing music, singing, dancing, gardening, or any other form of expression that a person considers to be creative (Healey-Ogden, 2001).

DeSalvo (1999) discusses the healing role of writing. The subtitle of her book includes the phrase: *How telling our stories transforms our lives*. It is possible that DeSalvo was referring to the experience of well-being when she told about a transformation in her life. Crawford (1991) chronicles her artistic journey through cancer—words noted on the cover of her booklet. In the Afterword in Crawford's book, Judy Weiser states, "I have watched—to use her own imagery—the flower open and the bird fly" (p. 34). In a similar fashion, Sobel (1994) expresses his dancing experience in his journal:

> I take a deep breath and relax. If I meet the Buddha on the road, I grab his hand and dance into the Void—take a free-wheeling spin through Emptiness and wind up Nowhere, which is none other than Now/Here. (p. 155)

Sobel brings attention to the interconnection between the spirit of dancing and moving through difficult times. It is as if dancing inspires a trusting journey toward fullness of life. Movement and change and light-heartedness are expressed by the previous three authors when they describe their experiences of engaging in creative expression. In

turn, their personal responses and the lay literature that focuses on health are reflective of what I am coming to understand to be aspects of the lived experience of well-being.

The inconsistent use of the word, well-being, and the interchangeable use of terms such as well-being, wellness, and health across and within the literature are invitations to explore the origins of these words. Etymological definitions provide a way to understand these origins. In turn, these definitions provide insight into the meaning of phenomena.

Etymological Sources

From what source does the word, well-being, derive and how does it relate to other words that are commonly used when describing one's feelings of being well, in contrast to feeling ill? Gadamer (1996) pays attention to the shared nature of language that provides a way to begin to understand experiences such as health and illness that come into harmonious relationship amidst their differences. Etymology can help to bring clarity to these thoughts by grounding our understanding in the historical underpinnings of these commonly related words.

Klein's (1971) etymological dictionary shows that health derives from the Old English word for health, which is "wholeness" (p. 337) and derives from "hal" meaning "whole" (p. 337). In Guralnik (1984), health is defined as "sound, healthy" (p. 645) and includes the definition, "physical and mental well-being" (p. 645). In contrast to health, the etymology of ill is from the Old Norse meaning "bad" (p. 368). The origin of ill is not certain (Ayto, 1990; Klein, 1971). It was not until the 15th century that the denotation of ill included the word, sick (Ayto). Guralnik defines ill, as being "not healthy, normal, or well" (p. 699).

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (1971) identifies historical uses of well-being in writings dating back to 1613 in Overbury's, *A Wife* (p. 289), and to 1617 in Woodall's, *Surgeon's Mate* (p. 289), where he used both health and well-being. As early as the 17th century, the terms health, well-being, and being have been used interchangeably. On initial review, the definition of well-being appears to be much the same as the definition of health. However, a review of the etymology of well-being provides a subtle, yet, important distinction between the two words.

An exploration of the definition of well-being, in Guralnik (1984) means "the state of being well, happy, or prosperous" (p. 1614), and well, is related to the German "wohl" (p. 1613), having the Indo European base meaning "will" (p. 1613). The German "wohl sein" means "to be well" [or] "in good health" (Wildhagen & Heraucourt, 1965, p. 1201). Comparatively, the word being includes the definition of "existence" and, philosophically, includes the definition of "fulfillment of possibilities" (Guralnik, p. 128). The German "Dasein" means "to be there" and "being, existence" (Wildhagen & Heraucourt, p.252). Well-being appears in the definition of health, and health appears in the definition of well-being. Well-being and health share the concept of wholeness with the distinction that well-being contains an element of personal drive to exist.

According to Guralnik (1984), the nature of the term, fitting, relates back to the notion of joining other parts; the definition of whole includes "a complete organization of integrated parts" (p. 1623). Guralnik also notes that harmony comes from the Greek "harmonia" meaning "a fitting" (p. 638). The words, wholeness, fitting, and harmony,

are interrelated and, when considered within the context of well-being, include a perception of possibilities and a will to achieve those possibilities.

Nepo (1995) provides additional insight into the meaning of well-being when he says it has come to be known as a relationship with another. The word fellow comes from the Middle English "felaghe" and from the Old English "feolaga" meaning "partner" (Guralnik, 1984, pp. 513-514). The Old Norse, "felagi" means "one laying down wealth for a joint undertaking" (Guralnik, p. 514). Wealth has roots in the Old English "weal" meaning "well-being" (Guralnik, p. 1610). It is apparent that relationships underlie well-being.

Relationships can be connected with family relationships in one's home environment. The words, home, and, house, tend to be used interchangeably. The Indo-European for house derives from "base" (Guralnik, 1984, p. 680) which means to "cover, whence hide" (Guralnik, p. 680). This definition includes "a building for human beings to live in" (Guralnik, p. 682) or "a dwelling-place" (Skeat, 1963). The etymology for home comes from the Old Norse "herme, home" (Guralnik, p. 670) that means a "place where one lies, dwelling" (Guralnik, p. 670). Although house includes an aspect of safety and a place in which to dwell, home includes aspects of staying awhile as in dwelling. I discovered that home does not include hearth; although hearth means "family life, home" (p. 646) where the hearth of a fireside is "the center of family life" (Gurlanik, p. 646). Hearth and, therefore, home are central to family relationships. It is possible that the experience of being at home may turn up in the experience of well-being.

This etymological exploration illuminates the existence of contrasts. Being healthy or experiencing well-being is in contrast with being ill, while the experiences of well-being and health are also considered to be different from one another. Well-being includes not only a personal drive to exist but, also, being in a harmonious relationship. The etymological literature is unclear whether or not the context of well-being represents a harmonious relationship only with others, or if well-being includes a harmonious relationship with oneself or with an entity such as one's environment or one's illness. When considering the place of relationships in well-being, it would be relevant to consider ways that dwelling in home space may contribute to the well-being experience. This initial insight is far from an expression of the lived experience of well-being but it points the way to further explore this phenomenon.

Beginning Understanding

On the surface, the varied literature that focuses on well-being is incongruent in its discussion of this experience. A closer look reveals a beginning understanding that hints at how to proceed with this research. It is becoming apparent that well-being is a natural condition of life. This natural condition, however, is often hidden from view. Well-being involves an element of more-being or a notion of something beyond what one experiences in times of health. Well-being can show up in health and illness and it commonly appears during occasions of vulnerability. Well-being is revealed in the space of difference where health and illness, co-exist. Balance, centredness, and harmony emerge within this space where vulnerability is embraced.

The literature tells about human striving that is not a deliberate search for well-being. Instead, this striving is focused on the achievement of wholeness where a sense

of harmony is expressed in relationships. It is becoming apparent that well-being involves human connectedness that is rich in present relationships and, likewise, in past memories. This connectedness includes a relationship with oneself. Underlying vulnerability and the perception of striving in well-being, is a strong personal desire and will to embrace life. Well-being is presenting as an internal wealth that involves self-transcendence. Its experience involves moving inside the self, transformation within the self, and a feeling of light-heartedness expressed as possibilities in one's life.

The experience of well-being is hidden from view, although aspects of its nature can be found in the literature. It is evident that, at least as early as the 1600s, people have attempted to name a human experience that is different from and, at the same time, is related to health and illness. To come to a better understanding of this experience, I turned to hermeneutic phenomenology, a type of human science research. This approach makes it possible to describe the lived experience of well-being without erasing or ignoring its inherent mystery. I explain this research approach in the next chapter and outline its application to this study.

CHAPTER 3: HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY: A WAY TO REACH PRE-REFLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

Hermeneutic phenomenology is not interpretation of particular facts or experiences to yield a correct product and its intention is not agreement (Palmer, 1969). Rather, "it lays open what was hidden; it constitutes not an interpretation of an interpretation (which textual explication is) but the primary act of interpretation which first brings a thing from concealment" (Palmer, p. 129). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the disclosure of possibilities. Palmer points out that historicality plays a significant role in our vision and understanding of the present. Possibilities emerge through our view of what has come before.

Instead of paying attention to the properties that no longer work, for example in illness, Gadamer (1996) states that we need to pay attention to everyday human being. Hermeneutic phenomenology involves seeking shared human meaning about human existence (van Manen, 1997). Language as shared is a way to come to understand everyday being-in-the-world. Sharing through language brings prereflective experience into the open. This interpretive research approach requires that I engage in writing and re-writing in an attempt to move beyond superficial understanding of well-being and move toward uncovering its shared human meaning.

Although I did not follow a strict research method, to remain true to the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology I engaged in six activities outlined by van Manen (1997). These activities are not meant to be carried out in a step-wise fashion but, rather, to be a dynamic interplay among [the following] six research activities:

(1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

(2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

(3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

(4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

(5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

(6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

(van Manen, pp. 30-31)

These six activities became ways for me to come close to the phenomenon of well-being.

Throughout this dissertation, I searched to understand prereflective experience (Gadamer, 1960/1989; van Manen, 1997) occurring before time is taken to think about an experience. I came to understand the phenomenon of well-being by considering it as a fusion of past, present, and future horizons of experience (Gadamer, 1960/1989). The hermeneutic phenomenological tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer, and van Manen's approach to phenomenological research became the foundation for this research, rather than the empirical phenomenological approach of Husserl using Giorgi's and Colaizzi's approaches to phenomenological research (Hein & Austin, 2001). Specifically, then, I did not attempt to bracket my beliefs and values; instead, I set my experiences and, therefore, my beliefs and values out in the open to enable the reader of this research to know the place from which I wrote. Well-being is a common human experience and, in that sense, my experience of well-being adds to the collective understanding of this phenomenon. Not only was I open to question my pre-

understandings and reflect on them during this research, I brought to light meaningful interconnections between people's experiences and my life experiences (Gadamer, 1960/1989). Rather than codifying data or following a specific method, the method emerged during my reflection on the data and during my writing and ongoing re-writing. It was important for me to remain sensitive to the data and to insights that arose from the data, and it was important to approach this research with an "inventive thoughtfulness" (van Manen, p. 34).

My passion to more fully understand the lived experience of well-being was my motivation to write, and it sustained my writing especially when the way to proceed on this journey became circuitous. Gradually, as I pushed forward and as I read and wrote and engaged in conversations with the people whose stories presented as exemplars, then read and wrote some more, essential themes began to emerge. I moved back and forth within the hermeneutic circle from the parts of the data to the whole, back to the parts, returning, again, to the whole during ever-continuous writing and re-writing. I did not expect to identify one interpretation generalizable to other populations. As is fitting with the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology, the mystery of the experience of well-being remained while I came ever-closer to let the lived experience of well-being show itself (van Manen, 1997). The results of a similar study would add to the results of this study instead of be an exact fit.

Data Sources

The data sources for this research are varied. They include people's descriptions of their experiences and a wide range of literature such as prose and poetry, plus art, all which bring the personal accounts of the people in this study to attention. It became

evident in my reading and in talking to people about the phenomenon of well-being that, although the hidden nature of this experience is elusive, people's descriptions hint at shared experiences of well-being. The more I read about and heard people's stories of well-being, I realized that these individuals presented as exemplars of this lived experience. The phenomenon of well-being may be elusive; however the people telling about their experiences are not. Therefore, I invited many of these people to participate in this research.

Anecdotal and descriptive literature of coming to experience this phenomenon substantially contributed to this study, as did research literature that shows aspects of health and illness, and points to the nature of well-being. As shared themes were revealed, I wove together the literature and the experiences that were told to me by the people I interviewed. Each data source showed glimpses of well-being and, collectively, these data sources contributed to understanding its hidden nature.

I followed the lead of the data sources on a journey of discovery. The data played a part in helping me move ever deeper. As I moved through successive layers of understanding, I turned and re-turned to aspects of the experiences that were described to me by the men and women. Their descriptions helped me to engage more fully in this research and to move to depth of interpretation. Data sources such as poems added to and highlighted the words, phrases, and paragraphs about well-being told to me by the people in this study. The poems, like the descriptions in the interviews, shimmered in a knowing way and joined with the stories I was being told. The writing of various authors provided ways for me to give words to the phenomenon of well-being and helped me gain insight as I moved toward its core. Some authors led me to other

authors. I entered and re-entered this data, including my personal experiences, to shine light on the hidden, prereflective nature of well-being. The mystery of this experience gradually and intermittently unfolded. Well-being opened to me like a flower opens in daylight in order for me to understand more fully. Alternately, there were times that resembled a flower closing at night only to reopen in the morning light. As this mystery unfolded, I related the phenomenon back to nursing practice to give pedagogic relevance to well-being.

Invitation to Participate

I interviewed five adults who are exemplars of this phenomenon. They were identified from data sources such as newspaper articles and lay and professional accounts of well-being. I became attuned to people's experiences of well-being that stood out and I invited these people to participate in this research. This approach to initiating interviews differs from approaches that advertise for people who are interested in participating in a study or that use a snow-ball method to alert people of an upcoming study that needs participants. Instead, this approach to contacting people for this study is similar to the selection process used by Benner (1984) in her interpretive research. Nurses who were considered by their peers and administrators to be skilled practitioners were approached to participate in Benner's (1984) research. A similar selection process was used in a follow-up interpretive study by Benner, Tanner, and Chesla (1996) when nurses where chosen to participate in the study based on administrators' perceptions of the quality of their clinical practice. Likewise, Maslow's (1968) classic study was carried out by gathering data from a variety of sources, including from his psychotherapy with clients. In this example, Maslow identified the

clients who, to him, exemplified particular aspects of being. Similarly in my study, I invited people to participate in this interpretive research based on the published accounts of their experiences that resonated with me. Their descriptions stood out alongside numerous other data sources as examples of well-being.

The small number of people I interviewed in this study is in keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. The rigor of hermeneutic phenomenological research does not come from interviewing large numbers of people in order to make generalizations. Rigor is demonstrated by engaging in deep reflection on data from various sources, including the experiences of a small number of people, and in ongoing writing and re-writing to fully describe shared human experiences.

I contacted people who were potential exemplars and who lived across Canada and in the United States. In order to provide them with a free choice of whether or not they would participate in this study, I sent a letter to each person, explaining the nature of this research and invited their participation (see Appendix A for a Sample Letter of Invitation and Appendix B for the Invitation to Participate). Within my message I informed them of my name, phone number, mailing address, and e-mail address in order that they could contact me if they chose to participate in this study, and I briefly explained what would be required of them. I made it very clear in my invitation that if they should choose not to contact me, I would not contact them again to inquire about their interest in this research. At no time prior to people contacting me, did I make face-to-face or phone contact with them about participating in this study.

Consent and Confidentiality

When people contacted me in response to my invitation for them to participate in this study, I provided them with a consent form and a letter of information that fully explained the study. This letter included a description of the benefits and risk of participation (see Appendix C for the Letter of Information for Participants and Appendix D for the Informed Consent Agreement). The potential benefits of participating in this research included feeling good about talking about personal experiences and feeling good about writing one's personal story of well-being. The potential risk of participating in this research included feeling, for example, sad because of talking about personal memories.

I reviewed the consent form and letter with each person who may, potentially, participate in this study. The five individuals who agreed to participate in this research lived in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. The interviews took place either in person or by phone, depending on each person's place of residence. Rather than using structured interviews, I engaged in conversational interviews of them describing their experiences of well-being.

Initially, I had intended to keep all exemplars' names confidential; however, following my interview with the first person, she offered for me to use her name in my writing and presentations. I declined her offer due to my agreement at that time with the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the U of A. After reviewing the taped interview and reflecting on our conversation following the interview, I realized that to honour her offer was also a way of honouring her experience. She died less than six months following our conversation and before I received HREB approval to obtain the

consent of the people who were volunteering to be interviewed, or their families as was the case for the first person, to use their real names in my work (See Appendix E for the Sample Letter and Informed Consent Agreement for Family of Participant #1).

Interestingly, all five people gave me permission to use their real names in this study and in related publications and presentations of this research. Each person would have had their personal reasons for offering this consent. Giordana, O'Reilly, Taylor, and Dogra (2007) acknowledge the shifting pendulum from full confidentiality in research to, at minimum, an awareness of participants' right to choose to reveal their identity. It is noteworthy that I had approached each person to take part in this research because of my knowledge of their names and experiences that came to light in published documents. Aspects of their stories were public knowledge prior to me interviewing the men and women for this research.

The five people who were exemplars, thus, became known by their first names: Ann, Alan, Jeff, Mary Ann, and Jeanette. I came to know these five people far beyond their published stories. I came to understand their life experiences in terms of their lived experiences of well-being. Each person's experience differed greatly from that of the others. Alternately, each person's experience offered glimpses into the lived experience of well-being and, together, gave clarity to this shared human phenomenon.

I sent letters of invitation to people ranging in age from their early 20's through to their 90's. The five people who agreed to participate in this research ranged in age from their 40's to their 60's. Although their ages are within an approximate 20-year age span, many of their stories reached back to their youth.

Exemplars' Profiles

Ann

Ann was in her 60's and was dying from internal melanoma. Her story of well-being showed through her creation of a garden that she opened to the community in which she lived. Ann described experiencing well-being during years prior to her diagnosis of cancer and, in particular, while she was coming to terms with terminal illness. She described experiencing well-being amidst her experience of dying.

Alan

Alan was in his 60's. He described numerous examples of experiencing well-being, the most vivid experience related to a marathon race in which he simultaneously experienced the strains of running, plus the pleasures of well-being. Alan described his experience of well-being as emerging from a felt balance within his body, mind, and soul at various times throughout his life.

Jeff

Jeff was in his 50's. His story of well-being spanned numerous years, in particular during his struggle to come to terms with the dying and eventual death of his first wife. He described his descent into depression, plus his connection with nature, people, and spirituality, all which buoyed him as he came to experience well-being.

Mary Ann

Mary Ann was in her 60's. Her experience of this phenomenon followed years of an abusive marriage. Her eventual divorce and the death of her ex-husband gradually enabled her to experience well-being. At times she experienced it at its edges, and at other times she was fully engulfed in this phenomenon.

Jeanette

Jeanette was in her 40's. Over her lifetime she had not experienced significant traumas or struggles. Instead, her view of life influenced her personal experience of well-being which, in turn, influenced her professional life as an entertainer who writes music and sings. Her strong spiritual belief was a catalyst for her feelings of well-being.

Shared Experiences of Well-Being

The men and women I interviewed described their experiences of well-being in similar ways; yet their life-experiences are very different. When I listened to their descriptions, I marvelled at the similar words and expressions shared by the exemplars and echoed in the literature. It is not the word well-being as much as the experience of well-being of which the exemplars were certain. Perhaps this hesitancy about the accuracy of this word is due to the unclear definition of this word in the health care and related literature, and in society's non-specific use of the word. I continued to use well-being because no other word emerged to take its place, and because the five people who participated in this study readily related to well-being. Although another term could have taken the place of this phenomenon, it is possible that well-being is the most fitting term, pointing to the importance of clearly distinguishing well-being from health and wellness in the health care literature.

Regardless of which word was used, the men and women's experiences could be located within the four existentials of corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), and relationality (lived relationships) (van Manen, 1997). These existentials could be described separately; however they exist together

within people's experiences of being human. Phenomenology is not about analyzing existentials themselves but, rather, about coming to an understanding of lived experience through the exploration of lifeworld themes that are fundamental to human existence (van Manen). In this way, it is possible to come to an understanding of the phenomenon of well-being where existentials intersect (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Early in my conversations with each person, it became evident that these four lifeworld themes are closely woven into the fabric of the individuals' personal experiences of well-being. When I attempted to write about this phenomenon by focusing on each existential separate from the other, I soon realized that the description of the lived experience of well-being emerged most clearly when the lifeworld themes were interwoven throughout my writing. Consequently, my writing reflects a blend of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality, although at times I focused momentarily on one existential over another.

Initially, I heard the experiences of well-being described as expressions of a sense of peace and contentment, an overall sense of calm. As I wrote, I became aware that although their experiences began with a description of a sense of calm, underlying this bodily experience are many other facets of corporeality. Thus, I will begin this phenomenological discussion here, much like peeling the layers from an onion until there is clarity in understanding the inner-most layer of the lived experience of well-being.

Individually, each of the people I interviewed told his or her account of experiencing well-being. The individual threads of their stories came together, giving clarity to their everyday experience. Throughout my writing and my journey to uncover

this phenomenon, I have interwoven the experiences of the five people with stories, comments, and experiences of well-being that appear in a range of data sources. Step-by-step, this data and my ongoing writing and re-writing brought clarity to this phenomenon. The result of this research is a descriptive text that will add to current understanding of this phenomenon. The intention of this study is to contribute to the lay population's understanding of their well-being, and to nurses' and other health professionals' understanding of their own well-being and that of the people in health care relationships.

CHAPTER 4: BEGINNING UNDERSTANDING

I came to this research with a personal understanding of well-being. For me, it includes a lightness of heart, peace of mind, centredness, and acceptance of and openness to possibilities within oneself and within the world. My understanding has arisen from a range of personal experiences that began in the innocent play of childhood and encompassed being ill, and becoming and being a nurse and counsellor. In this chapter I share some of my personal experiences of well-being, plus various experiences of well-being that I encountered on my journey to uncover this mystery. These accounts and the insights gained from literature and the arts frame my beginning understanding of well-being. I open with my experience of being ill and in hospital when I was 14 years old.

A Personal Experience of Well-Being

I was in hospital for about three months with Guillain Barré Syndrome, a paralyzing illness. There is no doubt that being totally paralyzed and being on a ventilator is more than adequate reason to be classified as being ill. The people around me focused on my body not functioning normally; however, my limited body functions belied my feelings of well-being. At that time I was unable to articulate the experience as well-being. I clearly recall knowing something was wrong physically, but feeling as if my condition did not warrant the label of being ill. Somehow and in some way, I felt well, very well. For the most part, I felt at peace in my restricted world despite changes in my physical abilities.

While I was paralyzed I experienced various physical losses, the most obvious being the inability to move. It is not the losses themselves that are the focus of the

experience I am describing here. Perhaps it is because of those losses that I was able to experience a sense of well-being. At the height of my illness I was locked in a paralyzed body with functioning vital organs, although there were times when my heart expressed itself in arrhythmias. More to the point of my story of well-being is the feeling of calm that I experienced within the depth of this solitary journey. What was that experience all about? For the casual bystander, one might think that I would be screaming to escape a body that failed to function as it had in the past. Instead, the more that I shifted my focus away from the limitations of my body, the closer I came to feeling connected with my thoughts and feelings, and the better able I was to move into a peaceful place.

Certainly, there were times that I longed to be free of my illness and to return to the activities that I enjoyed before being imprisoned inside my body. When my body was becoming paralyzed and, alternately, when my paralysis was subsiding, I lived through excruciating pain that jabbed at the depths of my soul. There were other times that I lived in the nightmare of dreams and hallucinations when, for example, I experienced the sensation of falling, knowing that I would be unable to help myself in any way. I could not even scream for help. Woven into those dramatic experiences of pain and fear, and the long, winding road toward recovery, was another experience—that of a feeling of peace and contentment. It would be understandable to think that my experience of peace and contentment may not be anything more than denial of what was really going on for me. Who would want to come face-to-face with total paralysis that was so severe that, for a time, it eventually robbed me of my eyesight, hearing, ability to breathe, and all movement and sensation? It was not as if I made a decision to

be at peace and content with my experience. My experience of well-being seemed to come from within my very being. I entered that peaceful place almost without knowing that I had wandered into that place.

I recall being able to function beyond my immediate surroundings by engaging in thoughtful activities such as planning Christmas presents. It was mid-fall. Although I was in the hospital, in my mind and, in essence, in reality, I was preparing for Christmas. Traditionally, Christmas was a very exciting and happy family time. At 14 years old, with little money to shop for gifts and given the physical restrictions that I faced, the only option I could identify was to make my gifts. With time to spare while lying in bed for days on end, I literally moved into my imagination to enable me to "shop" and to plan my creation of those gifts. I "knew" in my heart that I would not only be able to make these gifts but that I would be home for Christmas. Meanwhile, my parents had been told I may be hospitalized for a year. In my mind, the only assistance I thought I would need is for someone to purchase the items on my list to enable me to make my gifts. Although at that point in time my paralysis remained extreme, to me the paralysis was merely a minor physical deterrent because I embraced the certainty that I would be able to work on my gifts before I became otherwise busy with schoolwork.

One particular gift that I planned was to make a hat for my Mom. I recall the hat being a beautiful design about six inches tall, round, and with a small downward curving brim. The material would be a light tan, fuzzy, soft pre-prepared roll of material that I envisioned I could attach to a purchased hat form. I remember feeling so very much at ease when planning that gift. I would be prepared for Christmas despite

the awkwardness of my illness. I would be part of the family by contributing my share to the festivities. That imagined ability felt wonderful and natural. I did not feel different. I felt at peace with my restrictions. I felt at ease. I was having fun as I planned to enter into this creative endeavour. The planning for this activity took over much of my thinking. Oh, how contented I felt. My world fit together in perfect balance. Everything felt "normal". In those moments I was not living in the world of illness. I was in my world of design and anticipation of celebration. The colours I visualized in my mind, and my anticipation of the creative work and of the up-coming holiday, were literally pulling me into this imaginative world. I was at peace. I felt alive. I felt well. My experience of feeling well amidst being ill, is a theme that echoes in the humanities literature where happiness resembles well-being as it shows up during a range of experiences including illness.

Happiness and Well-Being

In the short story, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce (1916/1964) seems to point toward the nature of well-being—although he did not use that term—in the life of his young character, Stephen:

> He was alone. He was unheeded, happy and near to the wild heart of life. He was alone and young and wilful and wildhearted, alone amid a waste of wild air and brackish waters and the seaharvest of shells and tangle and veiled grey sunlight and gayclad lightclad figures, of children and girls and voices childish and girlish in the air. (p. 171)

Joyce uses the term, happy, rather then well-being to describe a feeling of lightheartedness that touches Stephen's inner being. In his aloneness, Stephen is in relationship with nature and with children at play. In contrast with loneliness, which is evident when well-being does not exist (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982), being alone can

create possibilities for experiencing well-being as it does for experiencing happiness. Well-being and happiness reflect similar experiences.

Joyce (1916/1964) describes Stephen's experiences in much the same way that Proust's (1924/1972) story, *Within a Budding Grove*, tells of happiness. Their descriptions of happiness include elements of well-being. Proust links happiness and solitude together when he writes about the narrator's experience of a carriage-ride into the countryside during which he connected with the image of three particular trees. This image brings to the narrator's mind, the possibility of memories of his past. "Suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray; happiness analogous to that which had been given me by—among other things—the steeples of Martinville" (Proust, p. 20). "I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it had not grasped" (Proust, p. 20). "But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather strength, I should have to be alone" (Proust, p. 20).

Proust (1924/1972) describes solitude being a catalyst for experiencing happiness, while Joyce (1916/1964) suggests happiness is experienced in aloneness. However, Proust writes about a certain "kind of pleasure" (p. 21). He says:

> [It] requires . . . a certain effort on the part of the mind . . . . That pleasure, the object of which I could but dimly feel, that pleasure which I must create for myself, I experienced only on rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that the things which had happened in the interval were of but scant importance, and that in attaching myself to the reality of that pleasure alone I could at length begin to lead a new life. (p. 21)

According to Proust, connecting with this particular type of pleasure leads to a new way of being. Happiness and pleasure are loudly echoing in the humanities literature,

while the experience of well-being is whispering in the distance. Within this literature is the notion that well-being arises out of times of solitude or being alone. Perhaps the nature of the experience of well-being shows up in this particular kind of pleasure.

In Burroughs' (1922), *The Chessmen of Mars*, happiness is expressed as a balance between body and mind. The character, Gahan, points out to the Martian, Ghek, that this balance is reflected in nature where different responses such as sadness and happiness are evoked. Although Ghek cannot express feelings of happiness, he experienced those feelings in the form of contentment when he listened to a woman sing. Ghek says of this experience that it is "a sense that seems to open before me wondrous vistas of beauty and unguessed pleasure" (Burroughs, p. 89). Ghek's experience of contentment may be a particular aspect of the experience of well-being.

Reflecting on Heraclitus' (McKirahan, 1994) thinking about harmony and balance, both Chopin (1969) in *A Reflection*, and Cather (1994) in *My Antonia*, highlight the harmonious experiences of various characters. Chopin writes about harmony that is expressed in nature and felt within the person who pauses by the busy roadside of life to experience the subtleties of the world:

> Ah! that moving procession that has left me by the road-side! Its fantastic colors are more brilliant and beautiful than the sun on the undulating waters. What matter if souls and bodies are failing beneath the feet of the ever-pressing multitude! It moves with the majestic rhythm of the spheres. Its discordant clashes sweep upward in one harmonious tone that blends with the music of other worlds—to complete God's orchestra. (Chopin, 1994, p. 622)

Cather describes the observations of the character, Jimmy, as including harmony in nature and in people. This observed harmony is reflected back on Jimmy in his memory of the land as if he was absorbed into the harmony of its observations. "On the

first or second day of August I got a horse and cart and set out for the high country, to visit the Widow Steavens" (Cather, 1994, p. 298). Cather continues to say:

> The changes seemed beautiful and harmonious to me; it was like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea. I recognized every tree and sandbank and rugged draw. I found that I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modelling of human faces. (p. 298)

Chopin and Cather connect harmony with expressions of well-being. Cather (1994), as does Proust 1924/1972), relates sights with memories of the past. Proust joins one's seeing of beauty and harmony with contentedness that resembles what previous authors have described as or pointed in the direction of well-being. It is almost as if seeing harmony and beauty can become experiencing harmony and beauty. Chopin's and Cather's observations of harmonious experiences reflect stories of well-being in a range of literature and the personal accounts that follow.

Solitude and Happiness

The narrator of Proust's (1924/1972) story, *Within a Budding Grove*, became friends with the character, Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray. Although the narrator valued this friendship, he described a feeling of "happiness" (Proust, p. 46) that was far more powerful when he was alone, than when he was with someone:

> For alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of comfort. But as soon as I was with some one else, when I began to talk to a friend, my mind at once "turned about", it was towards the listener and not myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. (Proust, p. 46)

Proust highlights an aspect of happiness occurring in solitude, rather than in times of being with others. He distinguishes joy that he experiences in his mind when he responds to his interest in another person, compared with joy that he experiences as a

feeling of happiness that arises from spending time in his own company and engaging in his work. Proust's description of happiness that arises from within and that is nurtured from within reveals an experience that is at the core of the person. This core experience may be at the heart of distinguishing a surface experience of happiness from a deep experience of well-being.

Everyday Experiences of Well-Being

Although this research is a way of putting a face on this seemingly elusive phenomenon, sometimes I feel as if I am trying to reveal something that exists only when hidden, and that may never be shown in print. Then, when I read more about the nature of phenomenology and I attempt to truly listen to the underlying messages that are apparent in people's life stories, slowly and surely I see that I am moving closer to describing the nature of well-being. Many life experiences point toward it. The challenge for me is that first I must tease my way through these experiences to locate and describe well-being before I can then move forward to show its hidden nature. Various words are used to describe this phenomenon. I will begin my exploration by focusing on expressions that include "light" and "hope" because those expressions have been used in the literature to describe aspects of well-being. Each time I listen to people talk about their or others' experiences, each time I pay attention to other sources of understanding like the arts, literature, and nature, I move a tiny step closer toward uncovering this mystery.

Light Within Darkness

Many of the experiences that I am hearing, tell about well-being appearing out of times of difficulty and of great personal struggle. It is the light in these stories that

stands out in contrast with the darkness of one's struggle. This contrast brings well-being to attention. When I pause to focus on the experience, I see glimmers of its existence in a vast range of accounts of people's lives.

Today, I attended a memorial for the father of a colleague. I had not formally met this *giant oak* as he was described in the service. While I was listening to various people describe his attributes, I could not help thinking that they were describing a man who may have experienced well-being. Some comments that were made at his memorial include: "He was a selfless man. He volunteered to help others. He saw the glass half full. He did not have a negative word to say about anyone. He was nominated Citizen of the Year and he was honoured by many organizations." This man was blind and lived with visual deficits his entire life. His hearing was diminished. He relied on others to take him shopping and to various appointments. He suffered with medical ailments up to and including the last days of his life. According to his family, friends, and acquaintances at his memorial, his focus was on others, not on himself. His many life challenges gave him direction for his work and ignited his passion to help others.

I wondered, as I listened to the speakers and to the music at this man's memorial, why my life path had not intersected this man's life path given that I work in the health care field in which he volunteered much of his time. At least I was not aware that our paths had crossed. Instead, I had come to know his daughter. I wondered if I would have recognized well-being in this gentleman if I had met him before he died. I have been talking to people who exemplify well-being. Why, then, might I have missed the phenomenon of well-being in this man? Perhaps I would have been so caught up in

all his activities and in mine that I would not have paid attention to the giant oak of a man who was short in stature and tall in his reaching out to others.

In another instance, on March 10, 2005 I listened to the midday CBC radio broadcast of the tribute to the four fallen RCMP officers who were killed on March 3, 2005, in Mayerthorpe, Alberta. At 5:30 that evening, I watched a special broadcast on BCTV Global National News that showed highlights of the service. According to both broadcasts, over 10,000 people were in attendance at the U of A, and many thousands of people across Canada and in other parts of the world tuned into these broadcasts. I found the tribute to be very moving and it left me with a pronounced sense of sadness for the families, friends, and colleagues of the slain officers. However, amidst the profound emotions of the ceremony, I heard a sense of hope. Assistant Commander William Sweeney of the Alberta RCMP spoke about how this incident brought communities of people together across Canada to share in a common purpose. This strong human connection was evident in the impact that the officers' deaths had on the Canadian population as a whole and on the community of police in North America. According to the 6:00 PM Global News on BCTV on March 10, 2005, officers from eight states in the United States attended the ceremonies, including RCMP and city police from a variety of communities across Canada. Masses of people came together, either personally or at a distance, to make sense of this tragic event. Beyond his focus on the trauma of the officers' deaths, Assistant Commander William Sweeney spoke of the need for people to gain support from communities of people and, also, to draw from one's faith to move forward into the future. He noted that although one's "faith and confidence" have been shaken by this event, there is peace in the support that comes

from each other and from one's beliefs that extend beyond the self. In a way, he was pointing to the possibility of experiencing well-being amidst such an event as this loss.

I know that I felt drained at the end of that day of tributes, and I did not have a personal connection with those four officers. Instead, I related to law enforcement officers as a whole and, in particular, to the RCMP officers with whom I have worked within my nursing and private counselling practice. Although I did not hear the word well-being mentioned on that particular day of remembrance or on the days following the shooting of the officers, I did hear a sense of hope related to the possibility that well-being is just beyond my awareness of the immediate set of tragic circumstances and experiences. I am left to wonder how hope is connected to the lived experience of well-being.

Hope Within Well-Being

Frankl's (1946/1959) struggle and those of his co-prisoners in the German internment camps in World War II show hope existing within a sense of well-being. When describing his fellow prisoners' experiences, Frankl states, "What may have been the real reason for their deaths [is] giving up hope" (p. 102). Without hope there no longer existed a reason to live, a reason to struggle, a reason to fight their cruel existence. Frankl links hope with uncertainty because there is a sense of uncertainty when one is hoping for something that is nonexistent. Frankl observed that "with the end of uncertainty there came the uncertainty of the end" (p. 91). If something already exists, then there would be no reason to hope. Could it be that the experience of well-being is interwoven with one's acceptance of uncertainty, with one's sense of hope for the future, whatever that future may entail? Frankl does not use the word well-being in

his description of his life in the internment camp. He does, however, describe experiences such as hope and peace, thereby pointing toward the phenomenon of well-being that is showing up during and as a result of embracing life difficulties.

Frankl's (1946/1959) discussion of hope and uncertainty is in contrast with a reprinted article from the *Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2004, where Sarah Milroy (McCarthy, 2004) describes Doris McCarthy happiness:

> One of the things that strikes you in her presence is that she is a supremely happy person. Happy with her life, a life of (for her) blissful freedom from husbands and children, a life of profound professional gratification . . . , a life of adventure …, and a life of robust friendships, and a life of deep spirituality. (p. 107)

McCarthy wrote her short autobiography of her 90 years of life to address the secret that many people think she possesses. The questions she was answering were: How is it that [she] is "so old and yet so well? So happy? So productive?" (McCarthy, p. 9). In her descriptions, McCarthy used the words well, happy, and productive as she portrayed her life that reflects far more than mere health.

McCarthy (2004) describes her simplistic life that has brought her "contentment" (p. 33). Much of her story focuses on times at her summer cottage. Her primary reason for going to the cottage each summer is to paint, but she creates much more than landscapes:

> Getting together afterwards [after painting in solitude] to see what each has done is a moment of very special fellowship. Our glass of wine at the end of the day has some of the character of a sacrament, an 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace' as the prayer book puts it. (McCarthy, p. 73)

She developed friendships within a very supportive community of friends and neighbours that have contributed to her sense of well-being. Her friendships are very

much a part of herself and of the well-being that she expresses in her description of her life and world. Connecting with people over a glass of wine is experienced by McCarthy as a spiritual relationship that follows a time of painting on her own. McCarthy balances her time with her friends with solitary time with herself. Her need for time alone is similar to Proust's description of happiness that emerges from within. McCarthy's experience of contentment points toward well-being and shows that being alone and with others are both aspects of this phenomenon. She is describing a deep experience that goes to the core of her being and that is related to her spirituality. Her experience is revealing what I am coming to understand as well-being.

Various people's experiences, including my personal experiences, provide direction for my thinking about well-being. Similarities and differences exist among these experiences, and some common themes are becoming apparent. I am discovering that well-being is much more than an association with health or emotional stability. Well-being is showing itself in the far reaches of the human condition. I am finding aspects of well-being in surprising places, as in the lives of people who are suffering from great personal hardships and tragedies. I am also finding aspects of well-being in the lives of people who are not suffering but, rather, who are sensitive to their human needs and to their unique human nature. I am finding aspects of well-being in the spaces between what people say and what they do not say, in the cracks between the words and descriptions people use to show their experiences, and in the pictures that they create with their words. The nature of well-being is shown there, although veiled and sometimes obscure.

Angelou's (1994) poem, *Caged Bird*, resembles a person's limitations during times of difficulty. Angelou writes about song that arises from a caged bird despite its deep struggles. When a caged bird embraces possibilities, its experiences reflect people's experiences of well-being.

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.
The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill

for the caged bird
sings of freedom. (pp. 194-195)

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Well-being is possible within all manner of life experiences. The bird that is caged mirrors well-being in the horizon of its life, in what might be. It is the caged bird whose wings are clipped who sings of freedom. The free bird is flying freely but not singing of freedom. The song of freedom from the caged bird arises from its fear, coloured with possibilities that extend far beyond the bird's limitations. It is the free bird that alerts us to the potential for losing our well-being; when it is flying freely it forgets about having been caged.

The caged bird's experience of song reminds me of my own experience of being paralyzed. I have been that caged bird. I once wrote of this time: "My lifeline [my respirator] allowed me some freedom to fly but my wings were clipped by my illness. I could not talk or even move a finger. At one point my struggle came only from my thoughts and imagination and, there was my only place of control" (Healey-Ogden, 1989, p. 37). I needed to feel in control of my illness experience and, at the same time, I needed to connect with people who would allow me to experience the freedom of once again flying:

> I needed to know that when I no longer needed the security of a lifeline in the form of a respirator, I would still have the security of a lifeline of people who would recognize that my wings were growing and allow me the beginning of new flight. (Healey-Ogden, 1989, p. 38)

Like the bird in Angelou's poem, I needed to sing of freedom and have my song heard in the distance in order to experience well-being. Singing of freedom placed my attention on flying rather than on captivity.

Well-Being as Possibilities

Gadamer (1996) writes about possibilities within illness:

> The truth that is concealed in all illness and in every threat to life and well-being . . . reveals . . . the unshakable will to life, the inviolable forces of hope and vitality which we all possess as our most natural endowment. It can teach us to recognize that which is given, that which limits us and causes us pain. (p. 90)

The challenge is to "accept illness for what it is" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 90). Etymology provides direction in this discussion of well-being. Previously, I have shown the subtle differences between health and well-being. Whereas health and well-being share the concept of wholeness, the etymology of well-being includes the notion of will. In combination with Gadamer's comments to refrain from forcing change, the "will to life" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 90), highlights possibilities in life. Being open to "the mystery of illness bears witness to the great miracle of health, [and] . . . allows us to live in the happiness of forgetting, in a state of well-being, of lightness and ease" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 87). Gadamer connects feelings of lightness and ease with well-being and brings attention to happiness that is nurtured by letting go of one's concerns. He subtly distinguishes between happiness and well-being.

Frank (1991) and Heidegger (2001) bring attention to possibilities that are apparent in the experience of well-being that shows up in the differences between

health and illness. Likewise, Clinebell (1992) and Dossey (1984) write about an experience that is different than health or illness. In attempting to understand this difference, my attention is drawn toward Keller's (1908/2003) experiences. Helen Keller lost her sight and vision at 19 months of age as a result of a serious illness (Keller, 1908/2003, p. 165) and sank into a darkness that reached to the depths of her soul:

> Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. "Light! give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour. (Keller, 1954, p. 35)

Three months prior to turning seven years old, Keller (1954) was introduced to her teacher, Annie Sullivan, who instilled in Keller a love for and understanding of herself and of her world. The light of love of which she speaks refers to the light that her teacher brought into her world. Clinebell (1992) quoted Keller's (1954) autobiographical statement as follows: "One can never consent to creep when one feels the impulse to soar" (p. 212). Because of Keller's relationship with her teacher and her newfound awareness of herself and of her world, she soared despite and, perhaps, because of her sensory deficits. The lived experience of well-being is showing up for Keller over time that she spent with her teacher. She soared within her experience of being blind. This experience was different than happiness or hope. She is pointing toward well-being as it is being revealed in the literature and in personal stories.

Bateson (1989) recounts the lives and works of five professional women who, over time and amidst turmoil and conflicting demands, discover that each of their lives are not set on a single, personal path. Rather, each woman experiences numerous re-settings of her path, ultimately yielding a patchwork quilt that when envisioned in its entirety is a work of art. Bateson highlights the task of discovering meaning in the disruptions along life's course and thereby finding beauty in life's interruptions. This work of art—each woman's life—represents possibilities that are yet to be created between each woman and the world. Bateson points to the health of the world being influenced by the health of all life forms, yielding essential harmony. Healey-Ogden (2001) and Schiwy (1996) echo Bateson's description of the possibilities arising from women's experiences of giving themselves voice. Harmony arising from these possibilities reflects the experience of well-being.

Thinking of possibilities shifts one's perspective toward future horizons. Dossey (1984) presents his concept of health as existing beyond what is usually considered to be health and illness. He includes numerous references from philosophers, poets, and Buddhists, and from people whom he treated, each illuminating a new perception of health, a form of being that is open to wholeness within life's difficulties. He does not negate the scientific advantages of managing illness, for example, by using technological approaches. Instead, Dossey pays attention to a similar notion to more-being described by Coward (1990) and Paterson and Zderad (1976). Dossey includes numerous examples of people working to become healthy and, in turn, their illnesses became more obvious. He argues that health arises by being open to illness, including being open to death. Dossey refers to health as being "higher

health or no-health" (p. 185). It is possible that his reference to higher health or no-health, and Coward's and Paterson and Zderad's descriptions of more-being are references to the lived experience of well-being that is veiled in the literature.

Gadamer's (1996) suggestion that health can really only be known in its absence, is an expression of the profound nature of being human. When people are confronted with difficulties in their lives they use language to express possibilities; however, to come to understand the nature of well-being, they move beyond language to take up an interest in the concealed nature of well-being. Language is a way to unconcealment (Gadamer, 1996). Understanding the lived experience of well-being will not come from being contrasted with illness but, rather, with returning people's attention to themselves to uncover aspects of the mystery of well-being and, in so doing, to return to a form of, as Gadamer (1996) states, "protected composure" (p. 116). Embracing vulnerability and mystery opens oneself to the lived experience of well-being that exists beyond one's usual day-to-day experiences. Frost's (1995) poem, *The Road Not Taken*, gives voice to positive life experiences that arise from embracing vulnerability and mystery.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be twlling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (p. 103)

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Discovering positive life experiences during one's travels on a new road in life can be a way toward well-being. In particular, Frost focuses on life's journey and the ways in which this journey and its adventures and experiences make a significant difference in his life. He opened to and followed the call of the one path and, by doing so, his life took a significant turn. Well-being is showing up amidst life's journey and is experienced in various ways according to the paths one chooses to take throughout a lifetime and according to one's embrace of life experiences along the way. Frost's poem exposes possibilities that are present on life's journey along the pathway toward uncovering the mystery of well-being.

Being Vulnerable in Relationship with Others

In Frankl's (1946/1959) preface he stated:

> For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. (p. 17)

Frankl describes times of personal despair and of questioning his own survival while he paid attention to the people around him. He focuses beyond himself and beyond his struggle with the darkness of his imprisonment. Although Frankl's story speaks of hope as a means for his survival, a seed of well-being lies in the shadows of his story. In the preface to Frankl's book, Allport describes Frankl as being "stripped to naked existence" (p. 9) and, yet, in his naked existence, Frankl soars beyond his captive, degrading experience to find meaning in his world and to explore ways to nurture others' journeys so that they might find meaning in their worlds. Frankl opens himself to others, thereby placing himself in a vulnerable position. Here he experiences a deep connection with life itself that touches his very existence. Well-being is showing itself in his hopeful responses and in his ability to see far beyond his imposed limitations.

Mairs' (1994) struggle with MS speaks to the notion of hope when she blends vulnerability and relationships with the well-being experience. Mairs says she experiences "shame for who I am" (p. 277). The only way Mairs can subvert the power of this feeling is to acknowledge her being, thereby "raising what was hidden, dark, secret about my life into the plain light of shared human experience" (p. 277). Out of this singing, she realizes that she is not alone in her struggle with MS. People with similar experiences communicate with Mairs. "It's as though the part I thought was solo has turned out to be a chorus. But none of us was singing loud enough for the others to hear" (Mairs, p. 277). Not until she finds a new voice, does she open toward experiencing well-being:

> This new voice—thoughtful, affectionate, often amused—was essential because what I needed to write about when I returned to prose was an attempt I'd made not long before to kill myself, and suicide simply refused to be spoken of authentically in high-flown romantic language. (Mairs, p. 279)

A catalyst of sorts comes to Mairs via a comment by the psychiatrist who meets her in the Emergency Room of the hospital to which her husband takes her following a suicide attempt. The doctor inadvertently places Mairs in a "typical" (p. 279) population when he refers to her as being part of a group of people who have attempted or committed suicide. This reference strikes a chord with Mairs and helps her to realize that she is not alone.

She begins to think "Me too!" (Mairs, p. 280). Out of this realization that she is in relationship with others, her life takes a turn:

> I think it was this sense of commonality with others I didn't even know, a sense of being returned somehow, in spite of my appalling act, to the human family, that urged me to write that first essay, not merely speaking out but calling out, perhaps. (Mairs, p. 280)

She embraces her vulnerability and joins others in a shared sense to bring voice to herself and to experience a sense of freedom to live in her world outside of the grip of shame. "I give myself permission to live openly among others, to reach out for them, stroke them with fingers and sighs. No body, no voice; no voice, no body. That's what I know in my bones" (Mairs, p. 282). Her relationship with others is critical to being in relationship with herself. Through this interrelationship with self and others she gives herself permission to move through shame and to accept who she is and to begin living. She finds her voice as it strengthens and as she joins a chorus of human voices, Mairs moves toward experiencing well-being. She gives herself permission to be vulnerable

with others as she connects soul to soul. Voice and body are tightly woven together as one in the well-being experience.

Being in relationship with others requires an element of vulnerability and hope for what might be. This relationship can be nurtured by the mere touch of another person. Touch can communicate possibilities and a connection with the world. Keller (1908/2003) tells of her experience of connecting with the world through the touch of a human being:

> Once I knew the depth where no hope was, and darkness lay on the face of all things. Then love came and set my soul free. Once I knew only darkness and stillness. Now I know hope and joy. Once I fretted and beat myself against the wall that shut me in. Now I rejoice in the consciousness that I can think, act and attain heaven. My life was without past or future; death, the pessimist would say, "a consummation devoutly to be wished." But a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness, and my heart leaped to the rapture of living. Night fled before the day of thought, and love and joy and hope came up in a passion of obedience to knowledge. Can any one who has escaped such captivity, who has felt the thrill and glory of freedom, be a pessimist? (p. 128)

Embracing a mystery requires trust in the journey itself. Keller embraces a new world beyond the emptiness she has come to know. Being vulnerable, and trusting in her journey toward this new world, allows Keller to let go of her familiar place and move out into a new world where touch opens meaning for her. Touch becomes letters which became words and, eventually, become understanding of and connectedness to her world. Keller lets go of her darkened world to experience light in her life. Being blind and deaf no longer shuts her out from experiencing her world. Keller comes to experience well-being when she opens herself to connecting with and living fully in her world.

The literature and the people in this study use the word, soul, to describe experiences that they feel deep inside themselves. Soul is defined by Guralnik (1984) "as being the spiritual part of the person" (p. 1360). The etymology of spirit is from the Latin, spiritus, meaning "breath, courage, vigor, the soul of life" (Guralnik, p. 1373). Although religion and closeness to a greater power than oneself are important for some people, the soul and spirit that reach to the depth of the person is starting to emerge as a common aspect of the well-being experience.

Well-being resides in embracing the mystery of life experiences. The experience of vulnerability that leads to well-being presents as a self-enriching solitude. This solitude occurs, not in times of loneliness when one is experiencing emptiness but, rather, in times of being alone. Our vulnerability at various times in our lives presents ways by which we can reach toward new experiences that are shrouded in this mystery. Well-being is not merely showing up on the surface of life. Instead, it is alive and deep within oneself. Chapter 5 is a description of deepening layers of understanding of the phenomenon of well-being. The metaphor of *a river* draws us into this phenomenon and leads into words, phrases, and stories of the experience of well-being told to me by the men and women I interviewed. The other data sources are interlaced with the people's descriptions of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5: MOVING INSIDE WELL-BEING

There is a story of a river who came to realize that "peace and harmony existed between her and the clouds" (Hanh, 1991, p. 132). She had been seeking happiness in continuously pursuing clouds, but focusing only on the clouds had left her feeling upset. When a wind emptied the sky of clouds, the river initially thought her life to be worthless because no clouds remained in the sky for her to pursue. In response, the river turned into herself, listening to her own crying that echoed in the water that crashed onto the shore. To her delight she discovered that both she and the clouds were made of water. She had been searching for the very thing that she possessed inside herself (Hahn, p. 131). Upon this realization, the river began to see the unchanging blue sky above her. It was then she knew that the vast blue sky had always been inside her heart. With this realization that she was one with the sky, she experienced happiness and peace. This new perspective helped the river to freely welcome and let go of the clouds as they came and went, to and fro, in her life. There is more to this story. The river came to discover that "when she opened her heart completely to the evening sky she received the image of the full moon—beautiful, round, like a jewel within herself" (Hanh, p. 132). The jewel—a reflection of peace and harmony—shone for the entire world to see.

Hanh (1991) ties the story of the river to a Chinese poem that expresses what it is like to be caught up in chasing after happiness that people think is outside of them and thereby lose sight of internal happiness that is freeing. The poet relates the moon to the possibilities that are beyond people's immediate focus on the clouds of life. "The fresh and beautiful moon is travelling in the utmost empty sky. When the mind-rivers of

living beings are free, that image of the beautiful moon will reflect in each of us" (Hanh, p. 132). The experiences of feeling free and being free bring out the jewel in each of us, the jewel for us to see and hold and to sustain our living and being in this world. Hanh reminds us that life is not about chasing after anything. Instead, life is about enjoying our being and becoming in this world.

This Chinese poem and the related story of the river reflect the stories of the people I interviewed in this research. Individually and collectively they provide insight into the hidden nature of the lived experience of well-being. Ann said that her well-being involves "listening to my intuition." She brings attention to intuition that is woven within the core of the person. Ann connects her intuition to experiencing that her "gut sings." "It's like when you open up an oyster and you find a pearl." In a sense, Ann did find a pearl deep inside herself—a jewel of well-being. Similarly, when the river became open to seeing the sky, the moon reflected in the river like a jewel within the river itself.

Ann says her intuition has allowed her to be at peace with her dying. "I'm aware it's going to happen and I'm at peace with it." Just as the river experiences peace and harmony when she is no longer chasing the clouds, Ann experiences the peacefulness of well-being when she does not let her thoughts about her terminal cancer diagnosis overcome her. "I don't let it get into my soul and eat me up. I'm not mad. I just accept that's what is happening." She listens to and follows her innermost messages. An acquaintance of Ann's recognized the contrast between Ann's terminal illness and the love expressed in her spirit. Another person questioned how Ann got to such a place.

Ann's experience of acceptance shines from her very core and reflects in every part of her being. Others recognize her peacefulness and, in turn, ponder their own life stories.

The story of the river is a story of contrasts. The more the river let go of the clouds in her life that blocked her view of the sky, the better she was able to see and experience the peace and harmony that was always present deep inside herself. Similarly, Ann describes not chasing after miracles. She tells the story of the time before and after hearing that there was nothing more that could be done for her cancer:

> They wouldn't give me any idea how long I had to live. And so I'm thinking, Geez, if its 3 weeks, I'd better make the best of it. I came out of the Cancer Clinic and I was at the hotel and right across is a dress shop. And when I got in, in the morning I bought all these fancy clothes to look nice for the Cancer Clinic. I came back in the afternoon and bought all these lovely negligees to die in. And the staff was just mortified. I said, "Well, I have some bad news. I'm not going to live so I'd better get some clothes to die nicely in." So I have these beautiful clothes that are just incredible. They're all in tears. And then I looked at them and said, "Don't do that. This isn't to cry over. This is okay. I know now what's happening in my life and I'm going to plan accordingly." And I think that's probably when I made the decision. There is no hope for this disease. There's nothing that can be done. I'm not even having another CAT scan. I mean, I don't know if they're growing. I mean, who cares? I am. I just am. That's all I can say. I'm not going to chase the rainbow. I'm going to enjoy my life.

Ann describes a transition from focusing on her illness and possible treatment to planning for her death. She does not focus on the clouds of her world that represented her upcoming death. Instead, she plans for her dying by buying some clothes for the occasion of her dying and then moves her attention toward ways to enjoy her life in a realistic way. Ann realizes that chasing after unrealistic possibilities is not going to bring her a sense of well-being. Instead, enjoying life that is still ahead of her promotes her well-being experience. In accepting her dying and reaffirming life, Ann experiences a sense of freedom. She pays attention to well-being that lies deep inside

herself. Just as a tiny speck of sand irritates its way to becoming a precious pearl, one's miseries, including one's negative thoughts and ways of being, can emerge as well-being.

Experiencing Rhythmic Movement

As with the river, there is an ebb and flow that underlies all of nature, whether it is the wind that churns the water or the rains that push the river over its banks. Alan speaks about movement being part of the experience of well-being. He said it is "like a spell that is broken if I think about how I am feeling. Instead, I ride the wave." Alan experiences his world effortlessly falling into place without thinking about specific details. He relaxes in the effortlessness of the journey and experiences well-being when he allows himself to be sustained by the wave that moves him forward.

The image of a river includes twisting and turning on its way toward the ocean, or meandering lazily through valleys as if it is reluctantly moving forward. At other times, a river plummets from massive heights in a cascade of water over a rocky and treacherous drop to churning eddies below. A river's journey can be miles and miles in length and take days and months in time to eventually reach an expansive ocean. Throughout a river's journey, its life pulsates within the ripples and waves that are forever connected within the water that rises up and returns, yet again, as rain to the river and land.

I recall sitting at the seashore with the waves flowing toward me, some quietly disappearing in the smoothing sand and some crashing with great noise and strength against the rocks. If well-being were a wave on a river leading to the great ocean of life, it would exist within a chorus of other waves, large and small. Life within nature,

as in a river, reflects the rhythmicity within human life. Rilke's (2004) poem offers a way to understand rhythmic movement and flow between a person's inner world and that of life outside oneself.

> Breathing, you invisible poem!
> World-space in constant interchange
> with itself. Counterweight
> in which I rhythmically become.
>
> Single wave,
> I am your gradual
> sea, the thriftiest possible:
> saving of space.
>
> How many places in space were once
> inside me. Many a wind
> is like a son.
>
> Do you know me, air, full of places that were
> once mine? You once smooth rind,
> rounding and leaf of my words. (p. 85)
>
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Good, in a commentary on Rilke's poem, finds that "breathing and poetry are both interchanges between inner and outer worlds" (Rilke, p. 168). He tells us that the self could be "a sea crossed by a single wave that represents the present moment's breath" (Rilke, p. 168). A single wave is part of the mighty sea. When I look out on the sea, the waves continue, one after another, like a rhythmic breathing of the self, like the rhythmic life forces within the self. Breath has a rhythm, hearts beat in a rhythm, life occurs rhythmically from morning to night and through to morning again. This rhythmic movement and flow is experienced in life and described by Alan's words, "I

ride the wave". The experience of well-being includes a rhythmicity that is relaxing and has a spell-binding quality. Frost's (1995) poem, *Neither Out Far Nor in Deep*, shows the interrelated responses between humans and nature, specifically the sea.

> The people along the sand
> All turn and look one way.
> They turn their back on the land.
> They look at the sea all day.
>
> As long as it takes to pass
> A ship keeps raising its hull;
> The wetter ground like glass
> Reflects a standing gull.
>
> The land may vary more;
> But wherever the truth may be—
> The water comes ashore,
> And the people look at the sea.
>
> They cannot look out far.
> They cannot look in deep.
> But when was that ever a bar
> To any watch they keep? (p. 274)

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We are drawn to gaze at the vast rhythmic expanse of the sea rather than at the steady state of the land. Horizons on land are interrupted by the contour of the land, whereas horizons on the ocean are only briefly interrupted by waves and floating objects. While each successive wave pushes toward the land, we gaze out at the ocean, connecting with the water that eventually overlays the shore. Gazing at the unending water connects us to the fine line of the horizon of past, present, and future. This hopeful gaze amidst a sense of quiet and calm is reminiscent of the experience of well-

being in which we are drawn to look toward what might come to be. In this hopeful gaze we join others as if we are drawn to and united in our search for the depth and breadth of the horizon of our lives. Well-being is experienced in the quiet and calm of this hopeful search and it is found in the depths and breadths of our horizons.

Flow

Jeff talks about the rhythmic nature of flow that contains a sustaining quality. This energy reflects Frost's (1995) poetic description of our human draw to stare out at the horizon of the vast ocean. Jeff said of his experience:

> It's not being blown around by outward circumstances all the time, but, wow. Coming back and saying, "I have energy here. I have life. I will survive. I will go on. Life will still flow in me." And it is flowing in me and I can tap into it and that sense of well-being isn't about circumstances. Has nothing to do with circumstances. I can have sadness and still have well-being, but my well-being comes because I am becoming more and more focused on my inner centre, my soul.

As well-being flows through and over and alongside Jeff, he is drawn to focus on his inner self, his soul. When he realizes his energy comes from within, he realizes he will survive. Well-being is not about situations or happenings. Instead Jeff experiences well-being when he focuses on the life force deep inside himself. Likewise, Alan says he needs only to be in the moment in order for well-being to exist. He describes experiencing well-being while running in one particular marathon race when he became one with the marathon race rather than focusing on finishing.

> It was quite marvelous. I had no expectations that I would finish. I thought, "I will do the best I can, go as far as I can, and if I drop out well, I gave it my best." So I ran in that attitude.

Alan points out that he experienced a difference during that marathon when he did not have any expectations of finishing compared with other marathons when he did expect

to finish. "I was going to say the stakes were high but that's just it. The stakes weren't high." He identifies that when he experiences well-being he embraces the flow of the event and of the experience and lets happen what will happen. He is not in a competition where finishing or even winning the race counts. He enters the marathon without expectations except to do his best. In letting go of what could be and embracing the flow of being in the marathon, he experiences well-being. He says his emotions during that time are "pretty serene, pretty calm. It's not feeling relaxed. It's feeling calm." Alan describes his experience of well-being while running the San Francisco Marathon. He says, "You're running along in complete silence. You can hardly hear the beating of the feet of the runners. Then there is this reflecting pool in this Greek temple. It was just like a dream." Alan experiences well-being as a dream that contains elements of flow and effortlessness as in calmness, as if it were a wave that endlessly flows through and about the soul of the person and sustains the person in all his or her being. Alan continues to say, "Finishing a marathon is a marvelous, incredible feeling of well-being. It is a kind of exhilaration. I felt emotionally quite moved." Well-being for Alan encompasses a calmness that is like entering a dream world and, upon finishing, experiencing an emotionally charged exhilaration. It is a dichotomy of experiences that begs of balance. He becomes one with this changing flow.

Bloch (2002) says, of her phenomenological study of the experience of flow and stress, that both "flow and stress appeared to work as frames for more specific emotions and feelings: in the case of flow, emotions such as joy, ecstasy, excitement, happiness, and pride" (p. 120). She describes flow, for a person absorbed in an activity

such as reading, in the way that well-being is starting to show itself in this study. "The person slips into a sphere of meaning that has its own structure and subject, wholly removed and separated from the world of everyday life" (Bloch, p. 111). People come to embody this sphere of meaning and relate their enriched feelings to this embodied experience (Bloch). From this perspective, self and the world, including nature, are separate from and connected to each other. This view is apparent when I think of the ocean of life that flows in us without ending when it reaches shore. In the following segment of Rumi's (2001) poem, *Masnavi*, nature is a continuous process.

> In the ocean there are many bright strands
> and many dark strands like veins that are
>
> seen when a wing is lifted up. Your hidden
> self is blood in those, those veins that are
> lute strings that make ocean music, not the
> sad edge of surf, but the sound of no shore. (p. 265)

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Barks, the translator, notes that "there is no beginning or end to the flowing of heart energy" (Rumi, p. 264). Rumi's complete poem appears to be unfinished; however, Barks (Rumi) reminds us, that each separate strand is part of the whole. Each of us is an unfolding masterpiece that ebbs and flows over time, like a river journeying toward the ocean. Eventually, a river returns to the earth as rain to begin its journey once again. Similarly, well-being does not end with the disappearance of a wave on a human shore. Rather, well-being lives in the ocean music deep in our souls that plays in the unending roll of one wave after another, after another, after another.

Coming to Know Oneself

Until the river was open to seeing inside herself beyond the surface waves, she could not experience peace and happiness (Hanh, 1991). Mary Ann, too, comes to know and value herself as she experiences a feeling of newness and of being free:

> I used my faith. I prayed. I did a lot of reading, and went to counselling, and was with friends of course, and writing. I could finally be myself. I just felt like a new woman. It was the most wonderful feeling to be my own person, again. I got rid of feelings of not wanting to live. I was very depressed. I had butterflies in my stomach for 30 years. And I was hypervigilent during that time. And in the end I did get the house as part of my divorce settlement. And to walk into that house, and to not worry or not wonder what was going to happen to me. I felt secure. I felt empowered. And I didn't feel like a victim any more. I finally realized I wasn't a victim when I got cancer. That's when I told the Dr., "This is the kick in the butt that I've needed." Oh, he was appalled. It's what I needed to realize that, hey, I have a life too. Being a victim, it's a terrible place to be.

It takes Mary Ann's spirituality, expressive work, and her friends, plus a diagnosis of cancer, before Mary Ann can see that her life is of value. Her feelings of depression are replaced with feelings of security and empowerment. This transition to come to know herself takes time. Although she gradually comes to see herself anew, it takes a diagnosis of cancer to move her out of her victim role. She says, "I had to find out who I was." She is referring to something far beyond knowing her personal characteristics, wants, or desires. Mary Ann says, "When I found this peace and contentment, my insides were happy, too. I didn't have to pretend anymore." Mary Ann discovers that to experience peace and contentment, she first has to come to know herself. Her self-exploration involves coming to feel good inside. Finally, one day, when Mary Ann experiences a sense of well-being, she realizes that her insides match her outsides. Not to say that she now is pleased with her physical self but, rather, she no longer feels the

need to cover up her feelings of depression. Mary Ann's bubbly self that she shows the world matches her internal feelings of well-being. Coming to know herself is being true to herself. It is as if two pieces of a whole finally find each other and join in peaceful co-existence. Mary Ann shares that as she progresses on her well-being journey, her counsellor notices and comments on the changes that are visible on the outside. One day she said to me, "You know, Mary Ann, I can see you are like a rose that's starting to bloom." Mary Ann's inside feelings of well-being match her outside expression of a rose that is opening to the world.

What is it like not to know oneself? When the river does not know herself, she focuses only on the clouds of her life that conceal the jewel that quietly lives in her depths. Mary Ann's experiences of not knowing herself and of being a victim, bring tension to mind. Mary Ann pretends, not only to the world, but to herself. It is as if she does not have an identity. Within and without, she exists like two strangers co-existing in the same person. The gaping differences, as in extreme tension, are too great for peace and contentment. Tension is palpable.

Occasionally in my counselling practice I have asked clients when they last did something for themselves. Frequently, their answer has been, "Never," and their answer usually was accompanied by a look that said they did not understand the reason for my question. They talked about not knowing how to do something for themselves because their attention had been solely on others. Exploring such a possibility with clients was not without difficulties. However, after they had moved through feelings of guilt for giving themselves this attention, and when they responded in follow-up sessions about what they had done for themselves, their statements were accompanied

by smiles. For a long while, and possibly for the first time in their lives, they came to know themselves differently and to give themselves permission to honour their own being.

If I were a stranger to myself, how would I know my needs, wants, desires, dreams, or most anything else about my internal self? How would I know the value of doing something for myself as a way of honouring my very being? A hidden inner self would make distant my thoughts and emotions; they would seem foreign to me. They would be unavailable to me in my everyday world. My insides would not match my outsides and, like Mary Ann, I may live with a tension that I did not understand. Bollnow (1961) states "strangeness is the area where man no longer knows his way around and where he therefore is helpless" (p. 35). All would not be right in my world. Like Mary Ann, my way through the tension to a place of well-being could be found by embracing both the mystery of myself and the tension. Well-being could be felt in the harmony between my inner self and the self I showed to the world. It could be experienced by honouring my whole self and therefore coming to know myself anew by being open to this mystery.

Well-Being as Openness and Mystery

Knowledge holds a place in the mystery of lived experience, in what remains silent (Gadamer, 1976). In describing Heidegger's ideas, Gadamer (1976) states, "Revealment and hiddenness are an event of being itself" (p. 226). In coming to an understanding of oneself, then, one moves beyond surface tones of comprehension. This understanding is about connecting with the tension that lies between well-being and life difficulties such as illness. It is about paying attention to the underlying

experiences of balance and harmony that are hidden from view within the fugues that remain silent. It is about hearing their silence and giving voice to that silence.

In *The Enigma of Health*, Gadamer (1996) questions, "But what is well-being if it is not precisely . . . being ready for and open to everything" (p. 73)? In being open to everything it is possible that people can experience well-being while being ill (Gadamer, 1996). There was a patient, John, whom Dossey (1984) described as seemingly defying his status of being ill. Dossey described John as being in critical condition following a systemic infection and being on many forms of artificial support. John was not healthy by medical standards. Although John was ill, he responded as if he was experiencing a balance between illness and well-being, between illness and what Dossey called health. John showed by his actions, not by his medical condition, that he was healthy:

> This man is healthy. Lying helplessly, affixed to various gadgets, this gentle, wise, alert man seemed beyond the distinctions of health and illness. John seemed to transcend the easy classifications of "sick or well," "better or worse." And he knew it, too—he experienced this transcendence, radiating a kind of healthiness even while moribund.
>
> An hour later John died—I am convinced in good health. (Dossey, p. 38)

John lived in an illness state; however, according to Dossey, John died healthy. He moved beyond being healthy or ill. It was as if he moved into another realm that reflected an aura of healthiness that transcended our common-day understanding of being healthy. He was dying; yet he radiated life. Dossey's description of John dying healthy reflects Gadamer's (1996) description of the "ontological primacy" (p. 73) of health that he refers to as well-being, described earlier in this study. It is possible that

John's experience of opposites contributed to an experience of harmony and balance that was well-being amidst his illness.

In Barss' (1999) personal story of healing from breast cancer, she describes, in a poem, her experience of an internal rhythm of harmony:

> It teaches me to balance
> And let my angst release.
> It brings to me a harmony
> That fosters inner peace. (p. 75)
>
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Barss experiences an internal rhythm that arises out of her experience of opposites—feelings of angst and of peace. In being open to the experience of breast cancer and loss of health, she experiences inner peace which reflects a sense of well-being.

As for the view that harmony and balance arise out of tension (McKirahan, 1994), it is apparent from the varied experiences of the people I interviewed, that there are times when too many activities create a disruptive balance and times when few activities create lack of harmony and balance in one's life. Mary Ann describes these extremes. She points out, "I didn't have any balance in my life before. It was all work and no play, and very emotional. I mean my emotional energy was all donated to my husband." Alternately Mary Ann says, "I think I have too much relaxation and meditation and that kind of thing in my life and now I need to get a little more active." She is searching for a balance of activities in her world in order to experience harmony in her life. Aoki, (1986) writes about tension that is energizing that moves one toward

possibilities in one's world. The balance point that Mary Ann was searching for reflects this energizing tension that nurtures one's experience of well-being

Aoki (1986) describes this balance point when he writes about a zone of tension that exists between two phenomena, for example for each new teacher and student as they dwell between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. The tensionality with which a teacher lives and teaches becomes a mode of being that leads students toward possibilities. Aoki (1996) provides additional clarity for understanding the idea of tension when he refers to a space of difference in his discussion of East and West. He relates the conjoined "and" to "identification" that is "a becoming in the space of difference" (Aoki, 1996, p. 6). Although this space is one of tension, this tensionality gives possibility to dwelling in this space awhile before moving onward and to experiencing a new sense of identity. Aoki (1996) experiences this tension as a way of dwelling in the space of difference between East and West. The people I interviewed speak of a tension in well-being that sustains them in their journey forward. When Mary Ann dwells in this tension-filled space, she comes to know herself anew and experiences well-being.

Heidegger (1993) describes a bridge in a different way when he says, "The bridge is a locale . . . . [that] allows a space into which earth and sky, divinities, and mortals are admitted" (p. 357). Heidegger (1996) sees this locale as having special qualities where "the bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream" (p. 354). Aoki's (1996) discussion reflects bridges that are places in which to dwell within a space of difference. Aoki (1996) turns to a discussion of the Chinese character for "'nothing' or 'no-thing'" (p. 6) where thing is always present to both. Out of that

realization, Aoki (1996) understands " 'and' as 'both "and" and "not-and" ' " (p. 6). Aoki's writing together with those of Heidegger's highlight the tension in well-being that reflects a dynamic dwelling within a space in which possibilities abound. Space, here, and thus the experience of well-being, is not still. It is active in becoming all that is possible as a reflection of its locale.

Mairs (1994) gives herself permission to regain her voice that told of her experience with MS. Finding her voice empowers her to embrace her very being beyond her illness and puts her in touch with the world. Voice is the bridge that not only helps her break out of silence; it is the bridge of acceptance that nurtures her personal dwelling in the zone between living with MS and living without MS, where she comes to accept her whole self in relationship with the world.

In Mary Ann's experience it takes time for her to find out who she is. She dwells in the tension-filled space of difference to reach a place of peace and contentment. Her felt tension changes from a mismatch of incongruent pieces that express themselves as disruptive tension, to a mode of becoming that is expressed as an energizing form of tension that, on the outside, resembles a rose. Mary Ann dwells in this space of difference, in this zone of possibilities. It is as if Mary Ann is now pausing in this space in order to move forward and, within this changed tension, she is experiencing peace and contentment. Hanh's (1991) story of the river offers an additional perspective. She, too, pauses in this space but, instead of being separate from the clouds, the river joins the clouds with a conjoined and. She discovers that she and the clouds are one. She soon comes to see herself and her world differently. In coming to know herself, the river experiences possibilities that arise out of dwelling in this tension between herself

and the clouds. She is dwelling in this difference that actually is a conjoined space of connections. Both Mary Ann and the story of the river point toward this space in which well-being is experienced.

When Mary Ann feels happy, she experiences well-being. The Greek word for pleasure, "hedone" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 17) is related to happiness and the broad notion of well-being. Gadamer (1991) finds that it is important to distinguish pleasure from happiness in order to understand hedone and he suggests that pleasure and happiness are part of well-being. Mary Ann distinguishes well-being from lack of well-being:

> When I'm not in a stage of feeling well, of well-being, I know it. Whereas before, I didn't know it because it seemed like I was in that horrible muck for so many years. But now I don't like to get into that muck any more.

Mary Ann has reached a place where she recognizes the difference between experiencing and not experiencing well-being. The metaphor of *muck* depicts darkness and being somewhat powerless against its strength. When she had not been experiencing well-being for years and years, she became mired in the blackness of the muck of her world and could not see that well-being existed outside this messy place. Now that she is experiencing well-being she avoids these mucky places in order to retain her sense of well-being.

Jeff says that even when he is sad he can experience well-being:

> I've just felt the ache of loneliness and it's felt really sad and empty but slowly, slowly the invitation, and I'm not talking about one day waking up and saying "I can do this differently," but for me a contemplative way of praying and living where I'm receiving, becoming receptive rather than achieving and performing, has enabled me to have that sense more and more of, this isn't bad, this is part of the draw, this is part of the ache of the whole creation.

Jeff experiences loneliness as a sadness and emptiness that slowly changes toward an experience of well-being. When he comes to appreciate the larger picture, the connection between his sad feelings and his spirituality, he can see that his feelings of loneliness are not as bad as he had first thought them to be. As a result, he begins to see his sad feelings differently and in so doing he moves forward toward experiencing well-being. When he openly accepts a deeply felt invitation to embrace a receptive attitude rather than only focus on his accomplishments, he moves toward experiencing this phenomenon.

Like the river who moves forward in understanding herself (Hanh, 1991), so do the people I interviewed; they speak of moving forward toward well-being. Jeanette experiences the fluctuating nature of well-being. She says that at times her well-being "goes into limbo but it no longer dips down like a roller-coaster when I used to experience my world through an ego-driven perspective." She describes this change in the following way:

> I've stopped worrying so much about what other people think of me. All of those stresses and worries that I carried around with me everyday changed. Now I view each person as being on their own path and on their own journey, and now I have a sense of calm and a sense of peace. And if I muck up, I don't beat myself up anymore like I used to.

Jeanette moves her focus away from self-consciously paying attention to herself. Her sense of peace comes from a change in focus and concern that is no longer ego-driven. Instead, it is open to whatever lies ahead for her. In letting go of worry, Jeanette moves closer to experiencing well-being where she is at peace with herself despite the circumstances.

Mary Ann and Jeanette both use the word, muck, to describe their experiences. However, Jeanette uses this word in the context of her actions such as in making a mistake or in doing something inappropriate. Jeanette accepts that "mucking up" is acceptable and she does not punish herself for making mistakes; whereas, Mary Ann uses this word to describe the darkness and power of her world when she did not experience well-being. Another contrasting use of this word comes from Ann's description of sitting in her garden. She says, "I sit out there like Lady Muck." Ann uses the word, muck, in an honourable way as she describes her seemingly Royal position in the garden of her creation that connects her with her experience of well-being. All three women use the term, muck, to describe different aspects of the experience of well-being. This difference reflects their varying places on their well-being journeys.

Returning to Jeanette's experience, what is it about losing one's self-consciousness that contributes to the experience of well-being? Jeanette is speaking about moving away from self-consciousness that focuses purely on her. Jeanette's experience reflects Jeff's experience of becoming more receptive. When her self-consciousness loses its egocentric nature, she no longer compares herself to others. Jeanette retains her self-awareness but her self-awareness is not a critical awareness of herself. Her journey is no longer dependant, in a comparative way, on others. Her journey in life is just that, her personal journey. A shift in perspective, a shift from oneself to one's life journey, is important in well-being. However to shift one's gaze entirely away from oneself could be just as problematic as an ego-perspective because the question would arise: How then would a person come to know oneself if his or her

gaze is on something other than the self? Perhaps the answer to this question lies in understanding the nature of a gaze. It may be, too, that the way a person dwells in his or her world and the way he or she dwells within himself or herself is significant in coming to well-being. Possibilities emerge on one's human canvas as the picture of well-being comes into view and is lived.

Embracing an Empty Canvas

Jeanette's self-conscious view of herself connects with Sartre's (1943/1984) description of the disruptive nature of the gaze of another person. Through the other's gaze we become aware of ourselves, placing ourselves as object both from the perspective of the other person and from our own perspective. The other's gaze takes away our freedom to see ourselves anew. We come to see ourselves anew by coming to know ourselves through that open and free space that is nothingness. We come to know ourselves through what is missing (Sartre). Sartre named this nothingness as being-for-itself which is our subjective nature, our consciousness that is incomplete. Nothingness is understood as "no-thing" (Flynn, 2004, Ontology section, para 3) rather than as nothing (Flynn), supporting the existence of possibilities. Previously I referred to Aoki's (1996) discussion of the presence of "thing" (p. 6) in both nothing and no-thing, thus focusing on connections existing even in differences.

Perceiving differences relates to the disruptive nature of a gaze. Sartre (1943/1984) refers to our nonconsciousness or objective nature as being-in-itself that lies in contrast to being-for-itself. We experience meaningfulness through our relationship with being-in-itself (Sartre). Together, our subjective and objective natures become ways to come to know ourselves through a gaze of self-reflection. Olthuis

(1997) says, "I encounter a face, my world is ruptured, my contentment is interrupted; I am already obligated. Here is an appeal from which there is no escape, a responsibility, a state of being hostage" (p. 136). The gaze of another undermines one's experience of freedom and contentment. Likewise, a self-conscious view of oneself disrupts the person's experience of well-being. Before Jeanette experiences well-being she focuses her energy and attention on herself. "The nature of what I did was to seek the world's approval." When she shifts her attention away from a self-conscious view of herself, she moves toward experiencing well-being:

> Now when I sing, I pray. I connect with God in my own way and I go out to an audience to share an experience with them. I consider it a circle, where the audience and their feelings—where they are in their space—are connecting with mine. The energy I bring to the stage is real. It's not out there for fame and glory. What I am feeling is a sense of peace, a sense of calm, and a sense of I am where I belong. I feel anchored. It's not ego-driven any more. It is effortless. I've been singing better than I have for the past five years. The place that I've come to also has physiologically changed.

Jeanette experiences well-being when she joins her singing with prayer. Her focus is on sharing her spiritual connections with her audience. Her purpose shifts away from her own self-focused reasons for singing and, out of this change, Jeanette experiences well-being as a calm, peaceful way of being. Her singing is no longer driven by a desire to achieve recognition. By letting go of this ego-driven perspective, she experiences beauty in her singing that is natural and effortless.

Jeanette moves from a self-conscious place toward a place of freedom. She experiences well-being when her self-reflection becomes conscious rather than self-conscious and, at the same time, when she embraces being free to continue discovering

her human possibilities. She embarks on an inward journey to come to know herself rather than to flee from this possibility.

Similar to an artist's canvas before painting begins, no picture exists on the canvas however possibilities exist for a phenomenal painting to emerge through the artist's creative expression. Jeanette's experience of well-being emerges on her human canvas as she comes to know herself differently. Frankl's (1946/1959) human canvas, too, reflects possibilities in his world amidst the gaze of the guards. When Frankl is in a hostage situation during his imprisonment, self-reflection leads him to experience aspects of well-being. He experiences hope, caring relationships, and meaningful moments of solitude that are expressions of this phenomenon. However, he experiences lack of well-being when he is apprehended by another's gaze such as that of a guard. Jeanette's experience of well-being emerges within the free space of self-reflection where she comes to know herself in new ways.

Being looked at can be distinguished from perceiving the world:

> We can not perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look fastened upon us; it must be either one or the other. This is because to perceive is to look at, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of being looked at. (Sartre, 1943/1984, p. 347)

Sartre distinguishes two types of looking and explains that we cannot simultaneously look at something and be conscious of being looked at. When Mary Ann focuses on being a victim, it is as if she is caught in this victim place. When she begins looking beyond herself, she can see possibilities in her life that elude her when she feels like a victim. Frankl's (1946/1959) description that resembles well-being, and Mary Ann's and Jeanette's experiences of this phenomenon—although in very different

circumstances—emerge out of their perceptions of the world in which they live and breathe and in which they come to reflect on themselves. They come to engage in their world and, in this engagement, they reflect upon themselves in a conscious way rather than in a self-conscious way.

Sartre (1943/1984) provides an example of self-conscious paying attention to self:

> What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches cracking behind me is not that there is someone there; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense—in short, that I am seen. (p. 347)

In being vulnerable, a person focuses on one's self in relation to the other and in relation to one's vulnerability beyond any experience of well-being. In the above example, fear for self emerges out of this place of self-consciousness. However, Sartre goes on to say that "I still am my possibilities . . . . but at the same time the look alienates them from me" (p. 352). Jeanette and Mary Ann experience well-being when they focus on their possibilities and when they see themselves in a particular way in the world. Sartre makes the point that "our emotions are not 'inner states' but are ways of relating to the world" (Flynn, 2004, Psychology section, para 2). Jeanette's self-conscious gaze brings about the absence of well-being. Her self-conscious gaze, however, inspires self-reflection and becomes a way for her to see herself in a new light. Mary Ann's focus on herself as a victim leads to an absence of well-being. Her shift in perspective away from feeling vulnerable is a turning point for her to embrace freedom within herself.

Dwelling in One's World and Within Self

Affective experiences such as anxiety matter when we deeply reflect on our experiences rather than flee from them (Heidegger, 1927/1962). With this thought, Heidegger is describing Dasein which "does not have its real being in determinable presence-at-hand, but rather in the dynamic of the care with which it is concerned about its own future and its own being" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 215). Being-in-the-world is grounded in our everydayness and, therefore, Dasein is being in relation with self and with the world. Dreyfus (1991) says that "Dasein's way of being (existence) is just the self-interpreting aspect of human being" (p. 24). Heidegger (1927/1962) describes Dasein's response to something missing: "When something available is found missing . . . circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time what the missing article was available with and what it was available for" (Dreyfus, p. 178). Heidegger (1927/1962) is referring to the everyday way that humans are in the world and the way they cope in their world. He uses the example of a hammer to make his point.

Heidegger (1927/1962) draws our attention to various modes of being aware of the functioning of a hammer. He calls the properties of a hammer and all that it can do for and with us, the mode of being present-at-hand. This mode of being describes the hammer, not when it is being used but, instead, when one is aware of its properties. When the hammer is put into use and it works, the properties of the hammer are not a matter of attention, for if they were uppermost in one's mind the task of hammering would be made difficult, if not impossible. Instead, one concentrates on the task of hammering. He calls this mode of hammering, ready-to-hand. If, however, in the midst

of hammering the hammer should break down in some way, the hammer and its functioning become obvious to the one who is attempting to use the hammer. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

> in our dealings with the world of our concern, the un-ready-to-hand can be encountered not only in the sense of that which is unusable or simply missing, but as something un-ready-to-hand which is not missing at all and not unusable, but which 'stands in the way' of our concern. (p. 103)

Until a person encounters difficulties in the workings of equipment or in his or her everyday lived world, the person is unaware of the qualities of the equipment and of the everyday world. It is not the properties of which one then becomes aware but, rather, the qualities of the equipment that have been hidden from view until the person engages in reflection.

These qualities are revealed from hiddenness, showing their existence all along; they co-exist in an apparent tension (Gadamer, 1976). He uses the following example from nature to show this tension: "It is not only the unfolding of the blossoms in the sun, but just as much its rooting of itself in the depths of earth" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 225). Well-being shows up as revealment and hiddenness experienced in being open to its mystery. I journey forward, now, to join this understanding with that of Alan's experience.

Alan describes times in his early university years when he experienced well-being. He says of those experiences:

> I just have to think of a particular moment or particular event or activity or song and that feeling of wonder and excitement and exhilaration again sweeps over me. That's an incredible feeling of well-being.

Alan points out that he can re-experience well-being that occurred in the past by bringing those memories into the present. Reflecting on his past, he says that as a

student he became aware of a whole new world opening up to him which reflects his experiences of well-being. He did not purposely set out to discover this new world but, rather, he paused to dwell in his world and embraced opportunities to discover this new world. A sense of wonder and excitement swept over Alan. He re-entered his past and was open to a full range of discoveries. This openness played a part in his moving away from a self-conscious view of his world and in being open to the world itself.

I am reminded of times when I try to make things happen in my world. It is at those times that I experience more tension and less well-being. When I relax into my world and am open to what life presents to me, I am far more likely to experience a sense of well-being. On the one hand, deliberate searching and trying to make well-being happen is the very way to ensure that well-being will not be experienced. On the other hand, well-being arises out of an openness to embrace new discoveries in and about oneself. Alan relaxes into his personal journey toward well-being and, at the same time, he embraces his journey with a measure of intent. He does not sit idly by waiting for well-being to come to him. He engages in coming to experience well-being. It is as if the experience of well-being lies in the balance between doing nothing and deliberately searching for well-being. Alan is speaking about well-being that arises out of embracing an adventure. He relates his searching to the nature of wonder and being open, not only to new discoveries but, also, to well-being that arises from reflections on past experiences of well-being. His past experiences underlie his future experiences of this phenomenon. The men and women I interviewed talk about well-being occurring within themselves in an atmosphere of giving and receiving.

Giving and Receiving

Mary Ann says, "Nobody else can give you this feeling of well-being. You have to search for it yourself." Mary Ann, like Alan who described being open to his personal adventure, shares that the experience of well-being is a personal journey. Mary Ann adds that well-being is not given to a person as in a gift from something or someone other than the self. Well-being comes to us in the form of a gift that we give to ourselves and that we openly accept—a gift that honours the self in each of us and honours the journey of self-discovery toward well-being.

Ann, too, describes her personal involvement in experiencing well-being when she gives herself a gift. She says:

> When I was younger and in nursing, I mean we had no money, and I had four kids, and you can imagine, they were in figure skating and, you know, girl guides, music lessons and all the things that cost money with a husband who didn't believe anything like that was important so, I had to maneuver, besides paying for the groceries and all the other things. But I always knew that it was really important to buy myself things. So every payday, which would be every second Friday, I might do something as simple as going into the Cheese Shop and buying myself a little piece of Feta Cheese which was a real treat, and going home and having a beer with Feta Cheese. And I always, every payday, went and got myself a little gift for working hard and for doing. It was probably selfish but I didn't care. It made me feel good and I would always think, "What should I get for my next little treat?"

Ann pays attention to her own needs even though her time, attention, and money are taken up with home and work responsibilities. The small piece of cheese she buys is her gift to herself to honour her hard work. By looking after herself, she experiences a sense of well-being when she recognizes her own achievements. In turn, she looks forward to future self-care gifts that will provide a way of extending her well-being experience beyond the present.

By being both the gift-giver and the gift-receiver within the spirit of lack of self-consciousness, Ann's experience points toward harmonious balance. It is not a notion of precarious balance where life experiences are forced to meet. Alternately, it is not a converging of experiences without opportunity for future movement. Instead, harmony underlies this balance. This dynamic harmony is reflected in the life-cycles in nature and in human life, and exists in the fine balance between what was, what is, and what will come to be. In the second stanza of Barss' (1999) poem, *Granny Me . . .*, she portrays this fine balance.

Work-worn hands
That have learned how to give
And to take what is offered–
A fine balance to live;
Light-stepping feet
That have learned how to dance
And to follow the Spirit,
Her journey enhance. (p. 73)

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Barss wrote about her 'granny' images that sustain her in her healing journey through cancer and, as she said, "help keep mind, body, and spirit focused on well-being" (p. 72). She welcomes the notion of growing old as being a fine balance between giving and receiving; this balance emerges as a rhythm that shows up as dancing. Her well-being comes from focusing on her granny spirit that is a reflection of her future.

Although Barss (1999) refers to giving and taking, she also refers to following. Taking and following show up in juxtaposition in Barss' poem in contrast with receiving and following. How do taking and receiving fit within the experience of well-

being? The word, receiving, expresses an open relationship whereas the word, taking, expresses a closed and controlling relationship with others and with the environment.

Mary Ann describes her well-being journey. "I got into my photography and I made cards. I gave them away as gifts and that helped. I feel so good when I can help somebody." Giving gifts to people and assisting people contributes to Mary Ann's experience of well-being. In contrast, she explains, "When I was not experiencing well-being I really didn't do anything for anybody. I was a taker. Everybody was doing for me." She focuses on taking and, inadvertently, draws attention to receiving. Taking, here, contains a self-centred focus whereas receiving contains an element of gratitude and openness to giving back in some way. Barss' (1999) choice of the phrase "follow the Spirit" (p. 73), leads me to wonder if her experience of "tak[ing] what is offered" (p. 73) is closer to receiving what is offered.

Jeanette experiences a giving and receiving relationship that forms within a connecting space. She combines her energy with the collective energy of the audience and is grounded in her relationship. In turn she experiences well-being. She relates a feeling of happiness to that of well-being and says of her relationship:

> It brings me calm and brings me peace and then allows me to bring energy to doing something good for people around me or just emitting positive energy to people around me and shedding light on them. My well-being is intertwined in that.

Jeanette's experience is an expression of happiness, calmness, and peace which underlie the energy that she brings to her encounters with others, whether they are an audience or her family. Her well-being is circular and emitted as a form of energy. By sharing this energy with others, her energy and thus well-being are enhanced.

The people who are exemplars in this study focus on the role that giving and receiving play within the experience of well-being. They describe giving and receiving as being woven into their descriptions of various relationships with themselves and with others. Ann shares her experience of giving to and receiving from others during her illness. She describes how she keeps involved with the world by engaging in projects. In particular, her garden becomes a way for people to relate to her and her to them during her illness. Each person, including Ann, is nurtured by this exchange. Ann says:

> I think that maybe I am conceited. Maybe I wanted something that was left behind that was me. I think part of it was, too, that, I can't sit here and just wait for that three months to three years to come. I've got to focus on something. I mean it was very hard to quit work. I didn't even quit. One day I wasn't there. And that was it, it was over. And that is not a nice way when you've been an active nurse and an active worker to retire. I mean it was not. So I knew that if I sat here doing nothing, I'd be frenzied. So I made projects. I have a new kitchen and a new bathroom. The garden out front, I designed, and brought everyone in that I needed to help me with it but basically that was my design. And I told everybody what it was and had tremendous people dropping in with flowers and statues and little mementoes. I mean I have rocks from Prince Edward Island that were brought back for me from a trip. I can look around and tell you every plant that someone has given me. I'm amazed at the variety, absolutely amazed at the variety. I didn't tell anybody, you know, "Bring this, or, bring that." I said, "Just take a snippet out of your garden and bring it over." Some people went out and bought. Some sent statues. I mean I have a Koala bear from Australia. I really do have all these; these are all friends.

Ann contemplates that her motivation to create her garden may have been due to conceit. Yet, in her discussion she focuses on nurturing others so they will feel good about taking part in her garden creation. Alternately, Ann's busyness with her various projects, especially her garden, contributes to her experience of well-being. By creating her garden she creates a community of people who give to her and, in their giving, both

Ann and the people receive a gift of comfort which is experienced by Ann as well-being:

> And I think it was, in some ways it was my nurturing, too. I mean I have been in a care profession for a long, long time. And I really found that this helped overcome a lot of other people that were just so upset about what was going on. If they could focus and bring me a plant, it was so much easier to do than to come and say "We're so sorry. We don't want this happening to you." So in some ways it might have been my nursing background that made me do this. I wanted everyone around me to feel more comfortable. That's why I had the living wake. It was to show people that it is the end of my life but life goes on. And I'm so glad I had the living wake and I mean I heard things from people I never would have known but that they would probably have said at the funeral to somebody else. But now they said it to me. Maybe because we are task-oriented as nurses, maybe that's part of it too. I want to create an atmosphere where people feel good about coming here and then it makes me feel good.

Ann connects her nurturing response in relation to her garden to her years of nursing. She not only wanted people to feel comfortable but, also, she wanted people to embrace the ongoing nature of life past the time she would no longer be on this earth. Ann wanted and needed to feel part of the process of people saying good-bye to her. Ann planned a Living Wake where people from the community joined together. Through this Living Wake, Ann was able to participate in her own celebration of life. Her well-being experience comes from being part of others' experiences during a time that precedes her death by about seven months. Perhaps their experiences also reflect this phenomenon.

Ann continues on to describe a particular moment that is focused on a stranger and on the community:

> And then the community: The guy who was coming to do the digging, I think of him frequently, to dig out the stumps and get rid of them all, said, "What are you doing out here?" And so my husband explained to him that it's a Friendship Garden, perhaps a Memorial in the future. The man said, "Why?" and they talked about me and he finished his digging and we

> went to pay him and he said, "It's my contribution." And off he walked. I guess it just made me feel good about the human race, too. It just gives me such joy and pleasure. I don't know how to word it better than that. It's so wonderful. I'm feeling really good and well when I feel all those feelings. It really is a spiritual thing, well-being. I mean it is from within and what you create.

Human connections contribute to her experience of well-being. Ann explains that her well-being extends beyond her connections with people she knows as family, friends, and co-workers. Her well-being comes from comments, in particular from the stranger who is hired to dig her garden. When he hears the story of her illness and of her garden, he declines payment. This selfless response contributes to Ann's feeling of well-being because she can then see this selflessness in humanity. She experiences feelings of joy and pleasure which she described as being a sense of well-being. She connects well-being with spirituality and an inner spiritual experience. She also relates spirituality to creativity which can foster well-being by its effect on the person who is the creator and on the people who respond to the creations.

Jeff describes his response to receiving from others:

> I'm learning more and more to receive what is, and to be grateful for the energy I put into it and not to have expectations of how it ought to go or what would make me feel like it went good. It is a freeing process not a giving up process. The opposite of well-being was when I thought, "poor me."

He speaks of a freeing feeling that accompanies his experience of well-being. It is not about his expectations or about his positive response. It is not about self-pity. His experience is about being in relationship in an open, receptive way. Jeff's experience reflects that of Ann's, although Ann relates her connections with others to the broad view of humanity that is related to spirituality. In contrast, Jeanette speaks of feeling anchored in an effortless way when she experiences well-being. Jeanette, Jeff, and Ann

are referring to well-being arising from connections with one's world. Well-being is being revealed as a harmonious balance between a freeing feeling and being grounded within one's world where one is open to whatever experiences lie ahead.

The men and women I interviewed refer to a common theme of openness in which they engage in giving and receiving within their experiences of well-being. Ann's description of her garden shows this relationship. Jeff, too, openly engages in the back-and-forth of giving and receiving. He describes visiting with a man who is 35 years old and whose mental development is at about age six:

> It's important for me to be in relationship with him and it's important for me to be part of an environmental group because I think the natural world is a world without power, without voice. I give myself to those places, to people who don't have power in the world or who are marginalized from the world, and to nature which needs an advocate voice. That gives me a lot of well-being. It brings me back to simplicity and it gives me a sense of, this is what the real world is, instead of the real world being the world of advertising, and constructed needs and goals for achievement and prestige. That's not the real world to me. The real world is a human person who expresses joy directly and sorrow directly because that's all they know. They don't have inhibitions and they teach me the gift of life. This man teaches me that. He's very self-focused and drives me crazy sometimes because he can manipulate you and he can't manipulate him back because he just gets on his own. He gets into his own needs but, on the other hand, he'll just smile and then he'll tell you he cares about you and then I think that's reality. It's not charity from me, its relationship with him and accepting that he has a gift to offer me and I have a gift to offer him. That feels like we've touched something really deep and that gives me a feeling of well-being. Being real and not needing the big show to prove that to somebody, and caring about advocating for him and his needs.

Jeff experiences well-being by openly accepting whatever comes from entering into and dwelling within the experience of giving and receiving. He not only experiences well-being by being in this relationship with this person and with nature, Jeff also learns about the simplicity of life. At this juncture of marginalization, Jeff connects

with the simplicity of life that is void of the material world that focuses on achievement and prestige. Giving himself to the natural, simple world brings Jeff a feeling of well-being. In reference to this relationship, Jeff refrains from judging this man and he does not place restrictions or expectations on the end results. Instead, Jeff accepts whatever will come from this relationship. At the same time, he gives himself to this relationship. Jeff's relationship reflects a deepness and openness that hints at the notion of trust that underlies this interconnection. This trusting relationship is strengthening for Jeff and it goes to the depth of his spirituality and his well-being experience.

Jeff, like Ann, relates his spirituality to well-being and to giving and receiving. This interchange for Jeff forms the foundation of his spirituality. He explains:

> God lives in my soul and we're one in a most intimate sort of way. That gives me the strength and the courage to enter into life. Then I can offer the gifts of what I have and who I am rather than sucking life out of everything trying to get satisfaction.

A spiritual dimension plays a significant role in Jeff's experience of well-being. He is strengthened to move forward to embrace life while offering himself to the world. Well-being is not about solely meeting his own needs. It comes from joining the world while being focused on other than oneself. Jeff and Jeanette speak of their spirituality being strongly related to their religious beliefs. Alternately, Jeff and Jeanette relate the breadth of spirituality to the experience of well-being in their descriptions of spiritual relationships. The people in this research collectively describe their experiences of well-being in spiritual space and in play space, creative space, and nature's space.

The existence of space reflects a place in which to dwell. Bollnow (1961) states, "To dwell is not an activity like any other but a determination of man in which he realizes his true essence" (p. 33). Dwelling elicits the notion of pausing awhile in a

peaceful, contented place such as being at home in one's home. House and home are radically different in this regard. One may think of a house as having a floor, four walls, and a roof, although a house can be a hut or a cave or a covering under a tree. One's "house is the reference point from which [one] builds his [or her] spatial world" (Bollnow, p. 32). Bachelard (1958) distinguishes further by pointing out that a home reflects an "inhabited space" (p. 5) that provides shelter and comfort. Even in one's imagination, memories of the past come together as expressions of the present and future in which we dwell (Bachelard), much like our dwelling in our homes. "Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days" (Bachelard, p. 5). It is becoming evident that well-being is experienced within the being of the person. According to Bachelard the being of the person resides in these dwelling places. One's home is within the self as we dream into the past and experience well-being. Lived-space reflects "the tension between outer and inner space" (Bollnow, p. 34). It is in this tensioned space, this space of difference, in which well-being is experienced. Ann, Alan, Jeff, Mary Ann, and Jeanette describe the nature of well-being as they experience this phenomenon in dwelling spaces of play, creativity, nature, and spirituality. The next chapter is an exploration of these spaces.

CHAPTER 6: DWELLING IN WELL-BEING SPACES

"I say, how do you do it?" asked John, rubbing his knee. He was quite a practical boy.
"You just think lovely, wonderful thoughts," Peter explained,
"and they lift you up in the air."

(Barrie, 1911/1994, p. 36)

.....

"Why can't you fly now, mother?"
"Because I'm grown up, dearest. When people grow up they forget the way."

(Barrie, p. 156)

The story of Peter Pan is an expression of the experience of well-being showing up beyond the practical notions of life. Children's ease with which they move into their imaginations opens them to experiences of well-being that can be difficult for adults to embrace. However, some children struggle to experience well-being and some adults readily dwell in this space. These differences and similarities beg the question: What is the shared experience of well-being as it shows up over the ages and in various dwelling spaces?

The men and women in this study point to times in their lives when they experienced a sense of freedom when they were playing. Their play experiences have taken them to a range of spaces that exist beyond themselves and their day-to-day worlds. Play spaces exist in a range of places in which they journeyed in their imaginations toward experiences of peace and contentment.

Dwelling in Play Space

Occasions in childhood stand out as expressions of well-being for the people I interviewed. In particular, play reflects well-being for Ann when she was a child. She

says she "delights in going back into [her] memory book," the term she uses to describe her reflections on her childhood memories:

> Amazingly enough, I'm not dwelling on the bad stuff. I'm remembering all the delightful stuff. My girlfriend and I used to dress up all the time. My Mom had given us this beautiful gold piece of material. It must have been a very light satin or something—a piece of cloth, that's all it was. We would drape it around us and become Jane Russell or Marilyn Munroe. She gave us a pair of old high heels and we'd be out in the garage just a "cheet cheooing" along. We'd play for hours, dressed up. Just hours. When I look back on it, I can see I was so Regal in that gold piece of cloth.

As Ann looks back into her memory book, she is drawn into the past to times when she dressed up as a movie star. When reminiscing about this play time, once again she relives this delightful experience. Ann's special play space becomes a dwelling place that contributed to her well-being. As a child, she wove her real world into her imaginary world and lost herself in play. In those moments of play, a piece of ordinary, shiny cloth transformed her as if she was Royalty. She was cast into her world of make-believe that became her reality during that time. Ann's experience of well-being emerges during these transcendent moments of play. Ann's childhood memories help to form her present experiences of well-being. In particular, she focuses on positive memories, especially memories of her childhood that involve play.

Play experiences draw people into the world of imagination and release them into reality. Slipping into a play world is like seeing their way anew. Childhood experiences of play are windows through which to see and understand well-being.

Turning to Moments of Play

Stacey Levitt's (1996) words show, poetically, how elements of play are retrieved by memory.

How I wish,
little bear,
that not had I
ventured into a little girl,
had not leaped into teenage years
and bumped into adult life.
I'd think back now,
if I could,
to the womb,
where warmth and comfort
wrapped me around.
What I would give,
I tell you bear friend,
to be once again
the child once was I.
I turn to the mirror
and look,
and see a wrinkled old face,
smiling,
I think teddy,
says I, I say,
I see a twinkle in your eye. (Levitt, p. 66)

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This poem was written in May, 1991, by Stacey Levitt (1996), when she was turning 14 years old, and just four years before her untimely death while jogging. (When discussing her poetry, I cannot bring myself to call Stacey by her last name, perhaps because I feel to do so would dishonour her youth.) At her young age, Stacey brings to attention the child in all people—the child, the wee infant who is comforted and protected and feels the warmth of the womb. She notes that as people grow older they succumb to a distancing of themselves from the innocence of childhood, all the while longing to be in a protected place. Stacey's poem is an expression of the wisdom

of childhood. It is an irony that adults can learn from the wisdom of children who, on first thought, seem to have limited life experiences.

Well-being is found in the innocence and honesty of childhood. Stacey Levitt (1996) tells us that as we age we do not lose our ability to experience well-being. Instead, adults are challenged to look deeper than surface experiences, to feel deeper than adults are commonly encouraged to feel. Her poem invites thinking about the clouding of one's ability to see and experience the simplicity and comfort of young life. In another of Stacey's poems, she shows the joy of childhood that commonly is restrained in adulthood.

untitled

Look,
I'm climbing up a waterfall;
I think I'm gonna make it.
When I get to the top,
I'm gonna slide back down
and do it again.

I'm climbing up a waterfall
and I'm almost at the top.
When I get there,
I'll scream and dance and jump.
And water will pound over my body
and I will laugh.

Or maybe I'll just climb up these stairs
and go into my room and sleep. (Levitt, 1996, p. 77)

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Imagination. Part of being a child. Fantasy. Part of being a child. Laughter. Part of being a child. Stacey wrote the previous poem when she was 15 years old. Her

waterfall ride is like a ride along the pathway of well-being where her laughter and joy seem all-encompassing. She slides down the waterfall to then climb back up along the banister that frames the stairwell to her bedroom, with no cares of the world and no thoughts of yesterday or tomorrow.

Thoughts of well-being take me to my childhood play experiences. I recall delightful times, playing with my dolls and romping with my cat. Swinging on my swing at home or on the swings at school sent me speeding into space where the wind "wapped" at my face and my hair flew through the air. It was almost as if I had the power to sail off into the delirious blue sky by merely pointing my toes during the most forward movement of the swing. In turn, playing games with friends brought gales of laughter from everyone in the game circle. Whether we were playing board games or running games or games that we invented, the game circle focused our attention away from the rest of the world. We became immersed in play. I entered into seemingly different worlds of play while playing house, playing school, and playing nurse. While playing, I did not concern myself with those seemingly insignificant differences. Instead, I entered my world of play as if crossing an imaginary bridge into a free world of colours, motions, and activities that could be anything I desired.

Certainly there were moments during play when I did not experience well-being, such as when I fell and scraped my knee; when my friends and I argued; or when I was left out of a game, especially a school game in which teams were chosen and I was not chosen until a good half of the other students in my class were "picked." The longer it took for someone to choose me for their team, the more acute my self-consciousness became. However, for the most part, my memories are of delightful

feelings of well-being that arose from entering into a world of play. It was not that my childhood was free of hurts but that in the moment of play, I felt free to lose myself and my self-consciousness in play.

As an only child and as a young child, much of my play was solitary. Being alone did not matter much to me. I easily entered into my imaginary world of play, magically changing all manner of stuffed creatures and dolls into my real friends and all manner of real places into imaginary play spaces. My tea parties with various "friends" felt as if I had entered a fantasy land untouched by adults. I became thoroughly absorbed in my play world. Nothing of the real world mattered in those moments. I was having tea and that was that. I was living in a meaningful tea party world with various characters of my creation. Giggles and laughs and serious times, too, were woven into my tea party world. I recall my conversations being something like this:

> Of course Little Bear, you must sit up straight. And Linnie-Doll, here is your tea. Maryanne-Doll, it is good to have you join us today. Sip slowly, it is hot. Oops, just a little spill. That is okay, I will clean it up. Ahhhhh. The tea is extra special today, don't you think, Mr. Bear?

As I sat with my companions, we absorbed the solitude of the moment. We reveled in the peace and quiet of our tea party world. We shared a table of imaginary delectable delights. We laughed and we embraced the quiet power of friendship. It was like slipping into a secret world, through a secret door that only I could enter, through a secret door into a play world of make-believe. My play world did not happen unless I created its existence. I felt at peace in my play world and fully connected with my inanimate friends. Time passed by without my knowledge of the clock. I felt almost suspended in time. My tea party world was a special place in which I entered for

awhile. My world of well-being, a glistening world of my imagination, was an expression of my fluidity; I was absorbed in two worlds, the real world and that of make-believe. My well-being in play expressed itself in my lived experience of well-being when I entered into a realm of self-forgetfulness.

Self-Forgetfulness

The Chinese poem quoted by Hanh (1991) is an expression of this way of seeing and being. The newness of the moon is reflected in each person "when the mind-rivers of living beings are free" (Hanh, p. 132). Hanh describes children as being masters of embracing fantasy in play. It is almost as if they weave the mysteries and wonders of play into their real worlds. Play and the real world float together for a child and merge in moments of delight. Sometimes play involves dwelling in the real world and being present only to what is in the moment. Hanh tells of his experience of receiving a cookie from his mother:

> When I was four years old, my mother used to bring me a cookie every time she came home from the market. I always went to the front yard and took my time eating it, sometimes half an hour or forty-five minutes for one cookie. I would take a small bite and look up at the sky. Then I would touch the dog with my feet and take another small bite. I just enjoyed being there, with the sky, the earth, the bamboo thickets, the cat, the dog, the flowers. I was able to do that because I did not have much to worry about. I did not think of the future, I did not regret the past. I was entirely in the present moment, with my cookie, the dog, the bamboo thickets, the cat, and everything. (p. 20)

Hanh describes a childhood moment of bliss with his cookie and his world around him as if he is in a world of play. It is a predictable moment, one he anticipates when his mother comes home from the market. When Hanh takes his special treat to his place in the front yard, he savours each bite while he savours the moment. He is "in the moment," although time slips by as if he lives in fluid time. He floats in a little piece of

bliss while he is one with the wonder of the sky, earth, and nature, and while he is in connection with another life, his dog. He is absorbed in his present world in a mindful way as the everydayness of the world falls away.

Play, too, occurs in the present with respect to mindfulness of self and of the world. Play is also a portal into the past and into the future where our imaginations take us on journeys into a land of pretend. Time is fluid. The world of time is anything we want it to be. For example, let us pretend we are living in years past. Let us pretend that we are newly born. Let us pretend we are already loggers, or nurses or teachers, or fathers. Let us pretend we are a cat, a dog, a bear, a horse. Let us pretend we are a big oak tree. We enter and leave the land of play as if there is a candy-coated highway along which we can sail our magical ship in any direction while time remains fluid.

According to Barrie (1911/1994), the story of Peter Pan is an expression of life's transition "from childhood, to adulthood to parenthood, and about our eventual replacement by our children" (p. 261). If adults fear the approach of the Neverland as Barrie supposes, thereby restricting their ability to fly, this fear can limit or restrict adults' ability to play. Children's playful experiences of well-being reflect their ability to self-forget and to embrace all possibilities. Adults tend to forget the way to fly.

Ann describes coming to play as an observer during small precious moments of connection with her granddaughter. "Sometimes it's just a silly thing like a granddaughter running across from where you're sitting, right into my lap, here, and throwing her arms around me and saying, 'I love you so much. I'm going to miss you.' And that was fun for me. That was special for me." Ann refers to being in a special place with her granddaughter in which Ann experiences well-being in a relational

space. Ann's playful time with her granddaughter shows that, as an observer, Ann focuses on her granddaughter and enters deeply into a play relationship with her.

A subtle difference exists between adult play and child play, where play changes in form and expression. As a child, Ann embraced play by fully entering into her play world and becoming the characters in her imagination. As an adult, Ann embraces experiences that bring her into joyful moments with her granddaughter. In the previous description of play during adulthood, Ann takes on an observational role when her granddaughter engages Ann in a playful moment. The nature of play, in whatever way it is experienced or expressed, is what is important in the experience of well-being. When children and adults lose themselves in play, they experience being free to discover and embrace their human possibilities.

Play is revealed as an invitation to enter into an open and free relationship with others and with oneself. In doing things together, in playing together, "the well-being of 'this' is the well-being of 'that'" (Hanh, 1991, p. 103). Hanh points out that "we belong to each other; we cannot cut reality into pieces" (p. 103). Play is reality in that we play in a real world although we can play within our imagination within our living and being in reality. Hanh was not describing play in and of itself. Instead, he was describing a retreat he attended in the United States with Vietnam veterans. He said that during the retreat "we practiced mindful breathing and smiling, encouraging each other to come back to the flower in us, and to the trees and the blue sky that shelter us" (Hanh, p. 102). The camaraderie of the retreat and the focus of the retreat on helping one another to reconnect with the world are similar to the interconnection in play

between self and others. Relationships in play are reflections of an embrace of and openness to the mystery that resides within the play space.

One's authentic self emerges as "an abiding sense of mystery" (Carey, 2000, p. 26) that can be seen within the experience of play. One's inauthentic self imposes one's ideas and ideals on oneself, on another, and on one's world, much as adults tend to do when entering a world of play. Adults' inauthentic selves hold them back from entering this place of mystery. Adults experience well-being when they embrace their authentic selves and, thereby, engage in harmonious, playful relationships.

In contrast with his people-related job, Jeff experiences well-being during a form of solitary adult play that emerges as creative expression. He said:

> I enjoy tying flies for fishing because it gives me a sense of completion of something. It gave me a wonderful sense of well-being. I made something. I created it. I finished it. I could look at it and say, "Wow. There's a Royal Coachman. It looks really nice." It is wonderful to just sit down and use my hands and experience that sense of my body and finishing something. My well-being comes from letting go of all my worries and questions and uncertainties and just focusing in on the moment and on what I am doing.

In this place Jeff combines his adult play with creativity and takes pride in his accomplishment of tying flies. His pride is not one of prestige and competitive accomplishment. Rather, it is a sense of heart-felt satisfaction that is coupled with calm and an inner sense of accomplishment related to possibilities, not an outward sense of accomplishment that deserves others' praise. Jeff experiences freedom to engage in creative moments, thereby letting go of his concerns related to his wife's terminal illness. When Jeff uses his hands in creative activities, he connects with his bodily experience of the creative work. This connection and the creative process help him experience well-being in his adult play space.

When Mary Ann does not experience well-being, she does not experience balance in her life. Alternately, she says, "I love to laugh." Balance and play and experiencing enjoyment come together within the experience of well-being. Ann describes times when, despite her physical condition, she "laughs and giggles, and [has] fun." According to Ann, laughter and having fun are more important than most any concern. Ann, Mary Ann, and Jeff describe their experiences of well-being that are expressed as having fun and enjoying one's activities in one's play space.

We are called to play by our very humanness but, as Stacey Levitt says, we give up our ability to play as we age when we de-value the wisdom of childhood. Some people in this study describe their experiences of well-being arising from reflections on their past. Others experience well-being in the present. Their ability to bring aspects of play into their present lives contributes to their experiences of well-being.

Ann highlights her experience of having fun in the moment. Following Ann's diagnosis of terminal cancer, she took her entire family to a hot springs. According to Ann, "you've got to look for those special moments or create them yourself." She continued on to say:

> I could have worried about the money. But I didn't. And my husband and I had such a delightful time. We were just having a good time. And this was right after the diagnosis. I mean it was very fresh in everybody's mind. We had fun, as a family. We pedaled bikes. And we went out. We paid one night, $700 for a meal. You know, money was no object, which has given a bit of freedom but, not necessarily. They were out in paddle boats. We were in the swimming pool all the time. Everybody was *having fun. Life is fun.* There's lots of fun, here.

She describes their time together as being "absolutely, incredibly wonderful." Her family had fun together, whether enjoying outdoor or indoor sports or going for dinner. Cost was not a significant issue and she notes that, that provided some freedom for the

family to enjoy themselves rather than to be overly concerned about money. When the day came for them to leave, Ann explains that she "marched downstairs and said, 'We're staying another day!'" Ann describes three generations of her family engaging in interrelated play and out of that conjoined place, she experienced well-being. She describes the family members as having fun, too. It was as if their individual enjoyment positively affected everyone else's enjoyment and quite possibly their well-being.

Poignant images of health and well-being across the lifespan have been captured by Freeman, Lee, and Critchley (2005) in a range of pictures that show both genders in relationship with themselves, others, and the world. These pictures show all manner of ways of being, including that of play. In almost every picture the people are smiling and, when not smiling, they are shown in introspection as if in moments of self-reflection. Young people, old people, sick people, and seemingly well people are featured in these pictures. One particularly striking picture is one of a very thin gentleman who, according to the caption, is dying. He is holding a sleeping infant. Both man and child are shown together in a contented way of being in relationship with each other. This art display points toward the lived experiences of people of all ages. In particular, people's introspection and their focus on other people show up in play experiences that reflect well-being.

Ann describes adult play that appears in moments of meditation and that involves having a good time. Her memories of her childhood experiences of well-being contribute to her present experiences of well-being. She says of her meditation play:

> I go to my field of daisies. I'm a young girl and I'm jumping around, playing in the daisies and stopping and making a daisy hat. It's a huge big

> field with hundreds of thousands of daisies. And I just jump through it and I have fun. That to me is well-being.

Ann is engaging in imaginary play that provides a space in which she is free to play. She imagines herself as a young girl freely jumping about and playing in a field of daisies. Whenever she chooses to stop, she makes a hat out of daisies and then continues on to jump through the thousands of flowers. Her jumping activity contains an element of rhythm that is present in her imaginary play experience that she describes as well-being. Not only does Ann recall past moments of well-being that she experienced as a child, she draws from her memories of well-being to strengthen her present feelings of well-being that are occurring in the last stage of her life.

In play we forget our immediate selves in our earthly world to enter an imaginary world of play. We see and experience and embrace aspects of life that are not present to us without first dwelling in an imaginary other place. We see anew in play because our focus is on other than ourselves in play. Gadamer (1960/1989) points out that self-forgetfulness is "being outside oneself [which] is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else" (p. 126). We are outside ourselves in imaginary and fantasy play. When playing, we engage in the moment of play within the space and place of play.

Well-being emerges out of freely being in relationship with ourselves and with our world. Forgetting ourselves entirely is akin to leaving our personal selves on a shelf. In play, we focus on other than ourselves in the real world. "When we want to understand something, we cannot just stand outside and observe it. We have to enter deeply into it and be one with it in order to really understand" (Hanh, 1991, p. 100). In returning to ourselves from play, we come to understand ourselves in a new way.

In contrast to mindfulness, Gadamer (1960/1989) discusses losing oneself in play. He says that although play has a serious side to it "all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 102). Play allows us to move beyond the rules of games or of specific purposes of play, and to move into a playful space in order to engage in life differently. "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 102). In Gadamer's words there are echoes of the notions of being open to and being lost in play, and letting go of real or imagined restrictions that limit play.

Gadamer (1960/1989) pays attention to the uniqueness of play as it relates to the aesthetics of art. "The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 102). Thus, in play, the person is changed by the playing experience but that experience is not goal-related. Play is dynamic and this "movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. The ease of play . . . is experienced subjectively as relaxation" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 105). Play is in contrast to focused work. It happens quite unintentionally when a person relaxes in the freedom of play without experiencing undue stress. "The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 105). In play one loses oneself in its rhythm; here, a person experiences a sense of freedom.

Opening Space

Returning to my memory of tea parties, I recall that the tea party place varied, as did the tea party space, although the actual tea party occurred mainly in our basement. I would prepare my play space with enough chairs to accommodate my bear and doll companions and me. I would set my play table with a special china tea set. There were only four cups and saucers in the tea set; of course only three "people" could join me for tea. I was absorbed in preparing my little space for this up-coming event. I felt free. I was in a special world of play—me and my "friends" in my tea party place. A protected bubble formed around us, encapsulating the tea party experience within the real place. I focused on myself and my guests. Nothing else mattered to me during this tea party moment. I felt at peace. It was almost as if I slipped into a tea party story in a delightfully written book.

My play experience shares aspects of Lewis' (1980) character, Lucy's experience of entering the land of Narnia through a wardrobe, and to Carroll's (1971) character, Alice's experience of falling down a rabbit hole into Wonderland. Both Lucy and Alice let go of their real world and meet all manner of characters in their newfound worlds. They lose themselves in the rhythm of their imaginary play worlds. Ann, too, describes losing herself in her play world to take on a Regal role or to enter a form of meditative play. She experiences well-being when she loses herself in play.

Play spaces can range from special places indoors or outdoors. I recall one outdoor play space at school when I was seven. Large old trees lined one side of the school, creating a border along the school fence. The grand, towering trees with their umbrella-sized leaves created the perfect canopy over a secluded play area. During

recess and lunch my friends and I would often search for one of the well-worn seats at the base of the trees. This play space became a private hideout of sorts, despite being open to the schoolyard on three sides. To me, the area felt closed to the other students because we could sit along the indentations of the large roots that created partial walls on either side of the hideout. This little play space became a private meeting room where we shared conversations, laughed, and delighted in each other's company. I recall the exuberant feeling not only of claiming a tree base but, also, of settling into the tree space with my friends. In some respects our play time in this space felt like a private celebration. The space beneath the tree felt welcoming as it surrounded us with huge tree limbs and broad leaves, seemingly placing protective arms and hands around us. The autumn brought with it a particularly delightful experience. The large umbrella-sized leaves lazily floated down from the sky, creating a fluffy gold and orange bed. We delighted in lying on the bed of leaves and gazing out into the schoolyard or sloshing through mounds of umbrella leaves that, at times, reached beyond our ankles. I imagined romping on cotton so light that it was possible for me to float away into a dreamy place. I felt well. I felt very well. I was having fun. This imaginary world allowed me to open space in myself. I experienced well-being in this play space. I entered child play and received joy from the experience as if in celebration of my relationship with my friends and with nature.

Celebration in Well-Being

A celebration place is a celebration time. Festivals are places of celebration and, according to Gadamer (1960/1989), "a festival exists only in being celebrated" (p. 124). The joy of the experience emerges in the celebration itself when people join

together in the festivities. Gadamer highlights self-forgetfulness within the festival experience. "Being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 126). Ann describes this self-forgetfulness when she and her family and friends celebrate life in her Friendship Garden.

As in play experiences, celebratory festival experiences highlight the self-forgetfulness that accompanies the experience of well-being. The festival space itself is often associated with balloons and streamers, food and dance, and all manner of celebration. People enter and leave the festival space; here they experience the joys of the festival events. There is freedom of space as people wander from event to event or from booth to booth. A transitory experience occurs for people as they dwell in the festival space. They come to feel free, alive, and joyful, and connected to themselves and to the others in that space. The music of festivals draws people into and holds them in this celebration. Long after they leave the festival space, the music stays with them, as if having seeped into their bodies and souls. Nature, too, is a festival place:

> In the woods . . . . a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befal me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving my eyes,) that nature cannot repair. (Emerson, 1971, p. 10)

Emerson describes his experience of peace, contentment, and security when in the company of nature that is dressed in all its splendour. Its festival dress invites Emerson into a special place in which he experiences well-being. It is as if no challenges or struggles would present themselves while he is in relationship with nature.

Dwelling in play, including in places of celebration, reminds us to take time to engage in creative expression. Play and creative expression share elements of self-forgetfulness. When immersed in play and in creative worlds, the day-to-day world slips into the background while one's relationship with creativity moves into the foreground.

Dwelling in Creative Space

The arts are expressed in all manner of creative forms such as gardening, singing, playing music, painting, drawing, and dancing, to name a few modes of creative expression (Healey-Ogden, 2001). Each person's experience of engaging in the arts is unique; alternately, common experiential themes exist. The people I interviewed in this research describe experiencing harmony and balance by engaging in creative expression, and they relate their creativity to their experiences of well-being.

Ann demonstrates her creative expression within her garden and, in turn, she experiences well-being. She says, "Balance and harmony to me is having the butterflies in my garden and making sure that I'm in the right space mentally and emotionally to be able to appreciate the butterflies." Ann experiences well-being in the creation of her garden and when she dwells for a time in her creative place that she experiences as balance and harmony. Well-being arises from both the creative process and from connecting with and being in the expressive work—living it, breathing it, and touching its very core.

An article called "Art and Soul" by Fiegehen (2005) was published in the lay magazine, *Homemakers*. The author describes the everyday experience of engaging in creative expression. This experience echoes the lived experience of well-being. Debra

Joy Ekiove says of her experience of group singing, "Harmonious sounds create harmonious vibrations, and when we are in this flow, we are brighter" (Fiegehen, p. 46). It is not merely the singing but, rather, being part of the harmonious flow of sound that arises from the singing that points toward the nature of well-being. Fiegehen quotes Joanne Marchildon's portrait work as causing physical and mental changes in her; "it brings back my energy, and I feel better afterward. I feel lighter and brighter" (p. 48). Marchildon is energized from engaging in creative expression. In a similar manner, Fiegehen paraphrases Jennifer Legace as saying that her poetry-writing experience is "the act of weaving her thoughts and emotions into colourful imagery and metaphor [and] makes her feel great" (p. 50). Legace's experience highlights that her creative expression and her thoughts and emotions become one during the creative process. Her experience of well-being arises out of her creative expressive experience.

On the surface, harmony and balance within creative expression can be thought of as existing without a struggle. However, according to Maser (2005), "the French painter, Ingres, says of art, 'one arrives at an honourable result only through one's tears'" (p. 19). A balanced struggle also exists within the experience of well-being. The balance is between not doing anything and struggling too hard. The experience of well-being is a personal experience. Could it be that when coupled with creativity, the honourable result to which Ingres refers relates to a personal perception of honour where one comes to honour one's own creative expression and one's own lived experiences? The tears of struggle show up in a particular way in well-being, in a way that opens space for people to experience themselves in new ways rather than moving their experiences further underground. Some of the people I interviewed pay attention

to being mindful and engaging in meditation. They become attuned to themselves and to their world. They dwell in their world to experience themselves in new ways and, thus, to experience well-being.

Alan describes his experience of well-being arising out of being mindful during his marathon races. He said:

> I ran in this attitude of mindfulness. I was totally focused on not getting ahead of myself like I'd done before—trying to break three hours and then getting all upset if I got a cramp or something like that. So I ran at this, what for me at that time was a gentle pace, and found myself with a whole different world of runners, people who weren't as charged up and gung ho and competitive as I usually was. So I just ran in this spirit, this attitude of mindfulness. I was aware of the risk of injury and of pushing myself too much, all the while making minute corrections and so I ran in that spirit.

When Alan ran in a spirit of mindfulness, he was present to himself and to his relationship with the world around him including the other runners. He was describing well-being that he experienced during and after this race. Alan's experience of being mindful while running is similar to Ann's experience of seemingly being suspended in play during meditative moments. Meditation, like mindfulness, contributes to the experience of well-being by bringing particular experiences into focus and providing an avenue for letting go of other experiences.

Meditative moments occur in creative activities such as in a group counselling experience when a co-counsellor and I guided a group of women in an outpatient centre for people struggling with addictions. Together, we blended music and pictures with self-reflection. The women, co-counsellor, and I, joined in meditative silence with music as a backdrop. We created images of ourselves: who we are inside and who we show the world. When the exercise came to a close, numerous women remarked that this meditative time and opportunity to see the differences between their insides and

outsides, was a freeing experience that, for some, held surprises. They came to know themselves in ways that they had not done in the past. Although I was balancing my counsellor and participant roles and, thus, felt restricted in my ability to fully participate in the exercise, I experienced feeling uplifted from the community spirit that filled the room, from the soothing sounds of the music, and from the freedom to be creative. If I had given myself more fully to this activity as the women had done, I wonder if I might have moved a little closer to experiencing well-being that day.

In contrast with notions of freedom and balance, tears can be a way of emptying oneself to experience fullness (Cather, as cited in Maser, 2005). Not everyone, however, reaches a point of tears. Mary Ann explains:

> When I meditate, I just kind of empty my mind of things that are bothering me. Things don't bother me any more like they used to. That's what I find, is that when I have that feeling of well-being, little things don't bother me.

Mary Ann describes this balanced approach to well-being. She is describing a letting go of concerns. Mary Ann meditates in order to free herself of her worries and concerns and, in turn, experiences well-being as a sense of balance in her world. By emptying her mind of day-to-day concerns, she finds that she experiences well-being that lasts beyond meditation times. Mary Ann's and Ann's experiences of meditation and Alan's experience of mindfulness relate to Maser's description of gardening where well-being is experienced when space is created. In that space, they shift their attention away from activities and concerns. Living and being become one in the space of possibilities.

McDade (n.d.) adds another perspective about mindfulness. She points out that "songs of themselves are not paths to the soul. Singing does not automatically carry us

there. When singers become the singing, however, some horizon, both inner and outer, opens and we know, if only briefly, why we live" (p. 4). When we are mindful to become the singing we reach beyond the self to experience well-being. Reaching beyond the self involves entering a new place. Jeanette talks about going to a special place when she writes. This special place is inside her. She says, "The whole world gets shut out and I'm living in my own little world." Jeanette loses herself in her world of song-writing. In this special place this phenomenon resembles losing oneself in play.

McDade (n.d.) writes about a different kind of loss. She discovered that she lost herself when she set aside her creativity. When she reconnected with her music she discovered that music is her "soul that shimmered in the timbre of [her] voice; [her] love of self and life was practiced in this deep and intimate relationship with song" (McDade, p. 1). She says of her return to music, "I found health again" (p. 2). Health, for her, echoes the deeply felt experience of well-being described by the men and women I interviewed. She continues on to say, "I made my way back to that piano bench, to the river that held it in such grace, that made song the essence of life, a deep prayer that permeated every cell and every space between cells with a fertile engagement with the simple act of living" (McDade, p. 2). She is describing well-being that is experienced through her embrace of song and that unites her with music that emanates from the depth of her living and being.

Husserl's understanding of the life-world is "the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes an object as such for us, but that represents the pregiven basis of all experience" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, pp. 246-247). Well-being is experienced when we reach this shared horizon to dwell in the freedom

of creative expression. It is experienced beyond the constraints that hold us back from moving into this creative space. When singers become the singing, when gardeners become the gardening, when painters become the painting, and when dancers become the dancing, they experience well-being. Well-being is experienced in the harmony and melody of the interconnection between the song, or the garden, or the painting, or the dancing or any soulful reaching beyond ourselves. This soulful reaching enables the interconnection between humans, and between a human and his or her inner self, and is a reflection of one's experience of well-being.

Song as the essence of life relates to song as the essence of well-being. It is not merely music that is contributing to well-being but, rather, song that is equated with any form of self-expression that embraces then lifts the soul of the person. It is as if song gives little wings to oneself and to one's life, little wings that lift a person out of the dull, dark days of trudging forward through life, the dull, dark days of struggle and survival that appear in day-to-day life. Those little wings of song appear in the rhythm of the dance of well-being.

Embodied Rhythm

The people who are exemplars speak of embodied rhythm that exists in well-being. They talk about rhythm being present in their relationship with themselves and with others. This rhythm shows up for Ann when she experiences relationships as a melody. She explains, "I get my harmony from the melody of friendship, from the melody of a loving family, and from people around me whom I know." Similarly, Jeff says:

> It's the dance that's created when I'm free to stand on my own two feet. My wife's illness pushed me to realize my own energy was mine. It

> wasn't somewhere else, in my wife or anywhere else, or with any other person. I had to face the limitations of a self-sacrificial, kind of a doormat style, and say, "No, I could receive, too." But I don't receive. Well there is a dance of receiving. Receiving is hard too - to receive from other people. To acknowledge your own need of other people and to enjoy the gifts of other people in your life. And then to be able to give and not demand - that's a huge dance. You have to learn the steps of how to be together in relationship with other people. I had to find it inside me.

The rhythm of human connection underlies Jeff's experience of well-being. He has to learn the steps of a relational dance in order to learn how to give and receive without any demands. Jeff learns and experiences that his energy comes from inside himself and not from anyone or anywhere else. When he comes face-to-face with his personal limitations and potential strength and learns to tap into internal energy, he experiences a sense of freedom which shows up as a dance of well-being. The dance of life for Jeff involves relationships between people and relationships between people and nature:

> There is an incredible interconnection and interplay between the people and the earth. It is very dynamic. When I see myself there, then I see that life is a dance. There is a dance of giving and receiving. There is a dance of receiving, to acknowledge my own need of other people and to enjoy the gifts of other people in my life, and to be able to give and not demand. That's a huge dance.

The dance of life leads Jeff toward experiencing well-being and he relates this dance to giving and receiving within his relationships. Well-being does not arise out of demanding relationships. Well-being is experienced through the giving and receiving of each other as gifts in and of themselves. By engaging in this dance, he comes to experience well-being. In reference to Buber's discussion of relationships, Levinas (1989) says, "Man can become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self" (p. 66). Jeff experiences well-being by being in relationship with self, others, and nature. Well-being for Jeff does not occur by leaving

himself out of this relationship. Being in relationship with himself, others, and nature is a way for Jeff to be in tune with his own energy expressed and experienced as a rhythm of well-being.

Our feeling sense brings us in touch with the rhythm of our being. The second stanza of Roethke's (1966) poem, *The Waking*, highlights this rhythm.

> We think by feeling. What is there to know?
> I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
> I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow (Roethke, p. 108)

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The rhythm of well-being is a blending of our senses that shows up as a felt dance inside the self. We come to know our world through our feelings. In contrast with Roethke's poem, Jeff goes a step further and describes this phenomenon as a dance of life. The rhythm of dance is related to the rhythm of well-being. Keller (2003) describes the experience of well-being that arises from the felt rhythm of sound:

> I listen with awe to the roll of the thunder and the muffled avalanche of sound when the sea flings itself upon the shore. And I love the instrument by which all the diapasons of the ocean are caught and released in surging floods—the many-voiced organ. If music could be seen, I could point where the organ-notes go, as they rise and fall, climb up and up, rock and sway, now loud and deep, now high and stormy, anon soft and solemn, with lighter vibrations interspersed between and running across them. I should say that organ-music fills to an ecstasy the act of feeling. (p. 36)

Regardless of her loss of hearing and loss of sight, Keller embraces all manner of sound as it reaches the far corners of her inner being. Nature's orchestral rhythm comes alive for Keller. Her experience of well-being is interlaced with the experience of the

rhythm of sound. Similar to Jeff's experience of well-being when he joins with others in the dance of life, Keller becomes one with nature's rhythms when she joins with the sounds of life.

The rhythm of well-being shows up in Michael Samuels' (Samuels & Lane, 1998) story of his wife, Nancy's experience during her struggle with breast cancer. Samuels tells of his wife's response while attending a Van Morrison concert:

> She closed her eyes and flew with the music. She was so happy there. I could see her dropping into herself and becoming at home, and actually restructuring her worldview. I was in tears and barely holding it together. She was concentrating on the music in the moment, completely involved, elsewhere, in the place where music comes from in her heart. She was in her place of joy, healing, and being able to be fully alive even in this time. This music was her cue, her vehicle, and she knew it, and that is why we were there. (p. 238)

Nancy moves to a place of well-being during her deep connection with the concert music. She comes to embody the messages, sounds, and rhythm of the songs. Music transports her to a place where she is alive and well during a time of earthly dying. Nancy is connecting with Van Morrison's music and in doing so she is connecting with others. The rhythm of creative expression, in whatever form the expression takes, becomes the connecting place with self. McNiff (1992) describes this connecting place:

> Rhythmic music, dance, poetry, and painting affirm a soul-state that exists independently of the individual human being. When I am drumming with a group of people, we move toward a common rhythm that contains us all. The drummer, dancer, and painter make contact with an a priori rhythm that guides and drives their expression. Rhythm and soul are to the artist what wind and water are to the sailor. (p. 61)

Rhythm opens up another world that draws us inside. Here, our expression is energized where rhythm and soul become one. This rhythm becomes the possibility

for our life stories to be told in a whole new way. "Art assuages through attunement to soul's movements and subtle vibrations" (McNiff, p. 61). The rhythm of creative expression connects us with soul, out of which arises the experience of well-being.

Nancy's (Samuels & Lane, 1998) response to listening to a music concert shows that music deeply penetrates her heart and soul. Nancy experiences the rhythm and soul of the music in the depths of her being and, in turn, she experiences well-being. She embraces the music with all her being. McNiff (1992) points to Roethke's (1966) poem, *In a Dark Time*, that "affirms that the soul's seeing may require a dark light" (p. 63). In the last stanza of Roethke's poem, he states:

> Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
> My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
> Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
> A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
> The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
> And one is One, free in the tearing wind. (p. 239)

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A dark light of one's life brings out one's felt freedom in life's storm. The struggle of life accompanies many experiences of well-being described by the people in this study. Their struggles lead them toward a free space of well-being where they openly embrace the present and are open to the future.

Dwelling in play, creativity, and nature share qualities of being in relationship with self, others, and one's environment, and in losing oneself in the rhythm of those spaces and times. Well-being emerges from a balance between losing oneself in and being mindful of one's world outside and inside oneself. Returning to the story of the

river, she came to know herself by being mindful of her place in the world and of her place within herself. This mindfulness reflects a focus on the horizon of one's inner self—the horizon that reflects past, present, and future. "Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 306). The river glistens as it reflects the fusion of these horizons within nature where well-being presents itself.

Dwelling in Nature's Space

Ann's garden becomes her dwelling place during her last summer before she died. In the previous chapter I referred to Ann's use of the word, muck. Here I relate her use of this word to her connection with nature. She says:

> I sit out there like Lady Muck, in my garden, and I look around and watch the butterflies. The butterflies have been in that garden every day except for the rainy, cold now. I actually, for the first time in my life, watched butterflies mate.

Ann describes a sense of awe regarding her time in her garden, noticing nature as she had never done in the past. Her seemingly Royal position shows as a humble position amidst the beauty and wonder of nature. Her well-being grows during her time in the solitude of nature's space. It is as if her feeling of Royalty, while in solitude in the garden with the butterflies, emanates from her feeling of well-being.

Emerson (1971) describes differences between ways that children and adults relate to and connect with nature. Unlike Ann's experience of dwelling in her garden, Emerson points out that adults' perspective possesses limiting qualities, whereas the perspective of children has a sustaining quality:

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.

> The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward sense are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. (p. 9)

Emerson pays attention to the place of nature in well-being and notes the constraints that adults experience in connecting with nature. He points out that most adults only see the face of the sun, whereas children are touched by the whole of the sun as it reaches their hearts. Emerson compares a child's way of seeing to an adult's way of seeing. A child's life is intertwined with and nurtured by nature. It is this child-like perspective that mirrors well-being even in difficult times. It is this child-like way of seeing that Ann was describing. Similar to Emerson's description, Stacey (Levitt, 1996) dwells in her childhood imaginary connection with nature. She teaches that well-being comes from letting go of the past and future to dwell in the present, not in a concerned way but, rather, in a way that allows one to connect with life and living. Stacey highlights a powerful connection between nature and well-being. Her poem teaches about life's simplicities.

I AM a ROSE

I am a rose.
I drink the purest of
waters.
I stand big and tall
in my brand new vase
and when people walk by
they stop and gaze
at my wonderful, yet delicate,
petals of red.
Then they totter off swinging
their heads.
And with a backwards glance,

they run down the aisle
in a skip or a prance! (p. 9)

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According to information provided in Stacey's book (Levitt), this poem, written at age nine, was the first one she had ever written. She shows the very real and possible human connection with nature. The beautiful red rose stands tall and shows itself to the world. Its delicate, yet strong nature, reflects a sense of well-being that captures people's attention as they go by. They respond in amazement at what they have seen and turn, once again, to take in this rapturous picture before moving onward. By witnessing this phenomenon reflected in the rose, the people themselves experience a change from tottering along to light-hearted skipping and prancing.

Previously, I described Mary Ann's changing face becoming like a rose as she moves toward experiencing well-being. She does not describe influencing others' well-being although, later in this chapter, I will describe the influence of Ann's garden on others as it brings people together in a circle of friendship. This circle resembles Jeanette's relationship with her audience where her singing influences her audience and the response of her audience influences Jeanette's singing. Refocusing on nature and its influence, it can teach us how to experience joy that we may not fully understand and, in turn, we experience well-being. It is more about being free to experience well-being than having a complete understanding of well-being. It is about being okay with the who that one is and with one's human qualities; it is being okay to wonder and to be connected with one's world. Stacey's (Levitt, 1996) youthful perspective mirrors the

simplicity of childhood and provides a way to view well-being as innocence and natural, open, human responses.

I offer that well-being is being free to see and experience beyond obvious human qualities. Lane (2004) explains, "What is not there is just as important as what is" (p. 202). He is equating gardening with poetry where the spaces are as important as the plants themselves. "Gardens are metaphors of who we were, are, and will be . . . . Rhythm is important" (Lane, p. 202). He goes on to say, "Space is never empty in a garden" (Lane, p. 202). Space reflects the importance of empty space woven together with filled space. Lane's description relates to the previous discussion of harmony, balance, and rhythm. Life is not a continuous action without pauses and changes. Life mirrors the spaces in a garden, the pauses in poetry and in song, and the light and shadow in pictures. Similar to Heidegger's (1993) view of a bridge that joins two shores, the rhythm of life bridged by nature's reflection brings well-being into existence. This rhythm reflects a fine-balance between life's changes.

In one of Mistry's (1995) stories, he describes the character of the proof-reader as surviving amidst change. This character states, "'Sometimes you have to use your failures as stepping-stones to success. You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair'" (Mistry, p. 268). Mistry's message highlights the image of stepping-stones as a pathway that serves as a bridge toward well-being. Sometimes these stones are submerged in water, requiring a measure of trust to follow the sometimes slippery, uneven, and concealed pathway. The stepping-stones provide the way but we are not always ready to embrace the journey that asks for our trust in return for guidance along the way.

Jeanette offers another perspective. When she is not experiencing well-being she says "Moments passed by. My joys that I was experiencing were temporary stepping-stones because I wanted something more." When she experiences well-being she explains:

> I am more observant of life around me. I say thank-you for the moment that I'm in and for communication with another person, or a little joy that has come into my life. I acknowledge it and I don't strive to have something that other people have.

Jeanette experiences lack of well-being when she moves across temporary stepping-stones of joyful moments. In contrast, her experience of well-being arises when she pauses along her life path to become observant and appreciative of immediate moments and occasions in her world. She embraces what she has in life, rather than what other people have in their lives. Jeanette experiences well-being when she pauses on her journey along the stepping stones of her life that contain, as Mistry (1995) states, all that life offers, from hope to despair.

Pauses and changes in life do not exist alone; the pauses and changes become part of the rhythm of the whole of life, creating a tapestry that is one's life. In describing Willa Cather's writings, Arnold (1984) pays particular attention to her character, Grenfell, in *Before Breakfast*. Grenfell discovers that change shows up as an enduring aspect of life that resembles well-being. Space is the mystery in life that gives it form (Arnold). Space, too, underlies well-being and gives well-being form so that we pay attention to its existence. Spaces in life are expressions of the fullness of the well-being experience in which we dwell.

As with play space and creative space, the rhythm of the garden is a reflection of the horizons of human lives: past, present, and future. The seasons of a garden are

not unlike the seasons of human life. Lane (2004) highlights the changes in a garden by saying that "the transition of blossoms will give the space a harmony of colour, make it a story with a beginning, middle, and end" (p. 203). Humans need only take time to observe and embrace the story of each human being's life to experience the harmony that is expressed in the transitions within each person's lifetime. Just as gardens have beginnings in the spring, through to summer growth and endings in the fall, and a period of winter rest, Lane points out that this rhythm also shows up in human nature. Jeff describes a similar notion of rhythm in nature that he experiences in himself:

> Seeing and accepting the reality of death and transience and then after my wife died I was walking in a park, and I was cold. It was December and I was looking at some branches of a poplar tree and saw the fully formed buds there and I thought, "That's just so awesome because it doesn't wait until spring to form new buds. It forms new buds, endures the winter, and then they come out in the springtime again. That was true for me then despite the fact that I was going through a very wintery time and a very alone time, not a flourishing time. I could trust that the buds of life were still planted in me and would spring forth. Those are the kinds of experiences that have been meaningful to me.

Jeff's sees the human cycle of life and living reflected in the winter buds of nature. Each cycle moves rhythmically forward through its various seasons. During a winter walk when he saw new buds on a tree amidst the cold weather, he realized that the buds of life in nature endure a similar journey as he was encountering. The buds survived through to the warmth of spring just as he would survive his winter loneliness and emerge in the spring of his life. This newfound trust underlies his well-being experience. According to Jeff and reflected in Lane's writing, rhythmic cycles mirror the lived experience of well-being in human life as in nature. Nature's garden is reflected in the garden of human life.

There is a fable of the old and wise gardener who sat for a year on the land of an emperor's palace, quietly observing the rhythmic changes in the seasons before planting a garden (Maser, 2005). When the garden was finished he said to the Emperor, "My work is finished. In every season and with the passing of every year, this garden will retain its perfection. Each plant in its growing will become a living part of a balanced completeness" (Maser, p. 16). This fable describes a strong spiritual connection between nature and self. "The fabled emperor is the Self; the garden, one's life; and the aged gardener one's own wisdom with which one must build one's Earthly Paradise . . . felt inwardly as a spiritual experience while gardening" (Maser, p. 17). Each human being has a measure of wisdom to build one's own garden paradise. As in this fable, the mystery of the garden paradise is found in the relationship between each person and his or her garden space. Merely making a garden will not bring about this paradise. Rather, temporality, spaciality, relationality, and corporeality co-exist within this spiritual experience as one convenes for a time in the gardening space and engages in the process of gardening. The gardener continues on to say, "There can be only peace here, for conflict cannot abide where Heavenly peace reigns. Each passing season will express itself in its own way. There will always be harmonious beauty in the gardens of your palace" (Maser, p. 16). Peace abides in this relational space where each season flows naturally from the one before. The fable reflects the experiences of the people I interviewed in this study. When they experience peace and contentment, they experience well-being.

Solitude as Presence

I re-turn to Lane (2004) who describes his experience of communing in solitude with nature when he is gardening. He distinguishes the qualities of solitude that he came to know in his gardening world. He said, "Solitude is other than peace and more than quietude . . . . It's not the wish to be lost within myself and it's not a wilful silence. Solitude is presence, not absence. It leaves at the moment of apprehension" (Lane, p. 154). By relating solitude to presence, Lane notes a subtle, yet, active quality in solitude. It is apparent in etymological sources that well-being possesses an active quality that shows up as a personal drive to exist, in a harmonious relationship within the person. Apprehension that vanquishes solitude is similar to conflict in the Emperor's garden. In contrast with these stories, well-being is experienced when solitude is presence without apprehension. Solitude includes the presence of calm, just as a balanced completeness is a place of peace, rather than of conflict, a place of peace where one is connected to the energy of life. Lane considers that it is possible that "happiness resides in such quietude" (p. 162). Well-being, too, resides in this quietude. Well-being resides in the far reaches of solitude and quietude that provide avenues for connecting human life and living with nature.

Well-being can be found in special places within nature's space where people are in relationship with themselves, others, and nature. Mary Ann connects with nature and her soul by focusing on the sunrises and engaging in other therapeutic activities in the days and months following the time that she left her husband:

> I left the home and I moved into a friend's apartment. One side of her apartment faced East and the other West. And I sat there every morning for three months, watching the sun rise every morning. This would have been October. And I journaled. And the sun came up and I would go off

> to work and then I would come home and I wouldn't do anything that would upset me and then the next day, the same thing. And this went on for three months. Watching the sun rise, going for counselling, and journaling, and friends were very important at that time.

Mary Ann watches the sunrises in a ritualistic way. It becomes part of her morning routine. In addition to connecting with nature through the sunrises, she ensures that her environment does not contain upsetting events or activities. Meanwhile, she involves herself with therapeutic activities that move her along her lengthy journey toward experiencing well-being. She dwells in her own special place across from and within the sunrises that accompany her journey.

Arnold (1984) says that Cather's novels, *Before Breakfast* and *The Best Years* "stress the importance of place, of having a place to return to, a place of one's own" (p. 170). The character, Grenfell, in *Before Breakfast*, struggles between his need for human relationships and his need to be in relationship with nature. When he is in the solitude of an island, well away from his family, he is interrupted by another human, a young girl. Ultimately, Grenfell realizes that humanity, itself, is not separate from nature but, rather, plays a part in a design that involves humanity and nature (Arnold; Cather, 1976). "For Grenfell, it is a place of solitude, primarily, and of relationship with nature, where his 'family' are a timid hare, a grandfather tree, and a youngster who is not even aware of his having adopted her" (Arnold, p. 170). Grenfell's struggle with the cold facts of science and with human relationships that portray constant change, show up for him against the backdrop of the enduring essence of nature and of humanity. Arnold writes that Grenfell came to discover "this life means, permanence in spite of impermanence, design in spite of chaos" (p. 166). The outcome of Grenfell's struggle helps him understand that his relationship with nature endures as does nature

itself. Grenfell's discovery of the stability of nature and of humanity, and of the relationship of the two, is expressed as feelings of joy and happiness, similar to the personal stories of experiences of well-being told by the people I interviewed.

The character, Lesley, in *The Best Years*, experiences a place of her own in a special bedroom retreat in her family home (Cather, 1976). After her death, Leslie's mother reminisces about the family home that they left but still owned:

> It's a comfort for me up here, on a still night. I can still hear the trains whistle in. Sometimes, when I can't sleep, I lie and listen for them. And I can almost think I am down there, with my children, up in the loft. We were very happy. (Cather, 1976, pp. 136-137)

Experiences of well-being are revealed in reflections on one's past. These reflections are in relation to special places of stability and solitude. Cather points to home as being a place of stability and solitude that fosters the experience of well-being.

When I consider my experiences of well-being, I often think of places in which those experiences occur. Similar to Jeanette's experience of losing herself in song-writing, whenever I am engaging in an activity such as writing, I lose myself in that activity when I am in a special writing place. I recall a time when I wrote one of my best academic papers for a graduate course. That paper became the first step for me to embark on thesis research. While sitting inside my dormitory room I was being less than productive. However, when I picked up all my writing equipment, walked outside into the summer sunshine and gentle breeze, and sat under the shade of a mature deciduous tree, my pen began to fly along the pages. I relaxed in the rhythm of my writing amidst the quiet activity around me. I felt as if I lost myself in my writing. I felt a sense of accomplishment during that experience but, beyond this sense of accomplishment, it was the experience of becoming one with my writing that stood out

for me in that special place beneath that tree. I often wonder why I continue to recall that writing experience under that tall, broad-leafed tree. I am left to question how that spiritual space is so very different from other spaces and places in which I struggle to write. I experienced a small sense of well-being at that time, partially because of the contented feeling that came over me. I experienced a sense of freedom while sitting under that tree that became a felt freedom for me to write. When I connected with nature, I connected with myself. I experienced being with nature amidst its quiet repose. Its strong presence strengthened me and, at the same time, freed me to write.

The way toward well-being, makes all the difference. Bollnow (1961) contrasts highways with paths that meander throughout nature. When I overlay Bollnow's comments with the stories of the people I interviewed, the nature of well-being stands out. Bollnow says that a "path . . . rests in itself. It invites loitering. Here a man is *in* the landscape, taken up and dissolved in it, a part of it" (p. 36). A highway focuses on the destination and blinds the traveler from the journey. A hiking trail is joined with nature through woodland and meadow. A journey toward experiencing well-being invites a leisurely stroll through nature to connect with nature and with oneself. Well-being is not about the destination. The nature of well-being is found in the journey along the way. This image reminds me of the saying: S*top and smell the roses*. This saying is a reminder for us to take time to convene with nature during the journey toward experiencing well-being because it is in the convening, the stopping, and the connecting, where well-being is revealed.

Lane (2004) embraces nature in nature's sanctuary. He tells his life story by weaving together the contrasts of his struggles, including addictions, with his

experiences of gardening. His gardening world becomes a sanctuary where he draws strength to forge his life-battles with his addictions. Lane says of his garden:

> This is when I am most content. It is like making a poem or drawing. Time ceases to exist and hours are only imagined things. The simplest physical task takes us out of ourselves. Like weeding, the most mundane endeavour is sometimes the most rewarding. In my addiction, I forgot this simple pleasure. (p. 112)

His writing provides a window for his readers to view his experience of well-being. Lane equates gardening to artistic work where poems and drawings emerge and give pleasure to the poet or artist. He moves out of himself during gardening as if he slips into another place beyond his immediate world. Nature becomes far more than the objects he sees. Instead, objectivity and subjectivity are interwoven in a space where Lane becomes one with nature. I am coming to understanding that the work of gardening leads to feelings that may not be readily understood. Lane says, "Working such a piece out from under hanging roots is a joy that passes understanding" (p. 54). The work of gardening brings joy to the gardener. His experience of joy joins with an experience of wonder. "When I place my hands in the earth, my fingers are like the tips of the first root of a seedling sprung to life. What I feel is wonder" (Lane, p. 43). Lane is present to himself and to nature and he experiences joy that goes beyond what he can understand. Instead of struggling to understand his experience of well-being, he embraces his felt joy and is open to whatever may arise from his connection with nature. His experience of joy that comes from his connection with his garden echoes what the men and women in this research described to me. It is becoming apparent that the experience of well-being is fostered in a climate of quietude and spiritual connection that is present in places of solitude, in places where a person can connect

with self, others, and nature. It is apparent that well-being cannot be apprehended but, rather, well-being is lived.

Like Lane's (2004) experience, Ann's connection with the earth when she is gardening is significant in her experience of well-being. Ann said:

> I don't wear gloves. I just dig in there. I've always wanted to be an artist. I wished I could paint. I wished I could sing. I can't do any of those things so I guess gardening is my creativity.

Although she strongly desired to engage in a variety of creative processes such as painting, it is gardening with which Ann closely relates, not only because she experiences success with the gardening process, but because she describes feeling a strong connection with the earth and with the whole of nature. She is moved by touching the earth.

Lane (2004) describes being "one with my garden" (p. 205) where his connection with the soil comes from working the soil. More than mere working the earth, he brings our attention to life within the earth. Lane said, "When I placed my ear to the garden's white skin, I could hear it singing as it turned itself back into water" (p. 63). He describes a special relationship with his garden. Lane's close relationship with nature shows his deep respect for nature. Nature helps him connect with and understand himself.

Both Lane (2004) and Ann experience a strong spiritual presence in their connection with nature which becomes their way of connecting with themselves. Ann describes a time that stood out for her when she was preparing her garden:

> I'm standing at the door telling the guy that built the frames, "Well this is what I'd like here." And this great, big, huge Monarch butterfly came right into me. There were no flowers—nothing out there—and it just came in, looked at me, and went off. Ever since then there have been all these

> butterflies in this garden. That's why everything you are seeing out there is butterflies. I don't understand if there are messages being given to me. I don't know what they are.

Ann connects with nature, not only as she prepares her garden but, also, when nature embraces her. The Monarch butterfly actually and symbolically holds Ann in its presence and joins her in a spiritual way. Although she does not understand the meaning of this connection, she is fully open to its embrace.

Ann describes the connecting space in her garden by emphasizing the centre circle:

> It turned out that I wanted a circle in the middle. I wanted a circle in the middle where we could gather and I could have people over and we could talk and visit which we have done a lot. Then I wanted to be able to turn around the whole circle and see the plants and ornaments that had been given to me. I don't think I put a lot of thought into it. Something drove me—I had to do this. I'm feeling joy because I'm feeling good. I'm feeling good because I love my setting,

Ann's experience of well-being is nurtured by the connecting space that emerges from her creative process. Similar to the creative drive that Jeanette and I described when referring to losing ourselves within the creative space, Ann follows a strong creative drive that she feels within herself. Out of her creative expression, she experiences well-being through the love that she feels from being encircled by nature, family, and friendships.

Mary Ann, too, describes working in the earth as being a form of nurturing from which she experiences well-being:

> I had never done any gardening. That was my husband's job. He did all the gardening as far as the grass went. I would plant a few flowers and then I was always running. I was always too busy to look after them. Now that I am retired I have the time. Working in the earth is the most wonderful feeling. From buying the flowers to putting the plants into the ground, and

> to nurturing them and to watering them and to seeing them grow—it feeds the soul.

According to Mary Ann, her experience of well-being comes from feeding her soul by connecting with nature. In the past, when she was busy, she did not have time to look after a garden. Having time makes all the difference. In retirement she fully engages in the gardening process in such a way as to feel nurtured by her connection with the soil and all that grows from it. When her soul is nurtured, her experience of well-being is sustained. Engaging in the creative process while in nature's space contributes to her experience of well-being. This spiritual connection between nature and the self is strengthened in the sanctuary of nature's space.

Jeff, too, describes experiencing well-being when he spends time in nature's space:

> Well-being for me is being outdoors in creation, connecting with air, with who I am, and with the natural world. Those are big things for me—getting out and connecting with the created world and my place in it. When my wife was in her metastatic time and she was dying, I'd go on overnight trips. I'd put a tarp up and go for a walk and be present to whatever was.

Jeff's experience of well-being comes from his connection with nature where he then connects with himself. He finds his home in nature's space. Jeff is present to the universe in an open, trusting way, and in this attitude he comes to experience well-being. Jeff, like Ann, Mary Ann, Lane (2004), and Grenfell (Arnold, 1984; Cather, 1976) become sensitive to all that nature offers. Jeff says:

> It is my sense of being rooted in finding a place in the transience of all things. It gave me a sense that I belonged. It was accepting of my dilemmas and my anguish and I was able to just let it be and have a sense of healing.

Jeff describes feeling at peace in nature's home that welcomes him inside. The safety of nature's welcome presents Jeff with the possibility of being at peace regardless of his struggles. When Jeff feels grounded within nature, he comes home to experience well-being. Jeff continues his description by saying:

> There is something about the fact that I'm breathing fresh air. There's something about the fact that everything is accepted. I remember when my wife was sick, I'd be out in nature over night and it just accepts my anguish, it accepts my pain, it accepts my sadness. I'm here and it accepts me. Then there's the interdependence of it. I think it keeps me from thinking that my life is the whole of the universe. And it helps me to belong to a larger scheme of things. It's partly the delight of how do you construct anything that's as beautiful? Like, it's just beautiful the way it is and we try to imitate it but we can't. For me it's so interesting to see different colours that I would never think of putting together, just get stuck together.

Dwelling in nature's space fulfills a precious need deep inside Jeff. In the depth of his anguish about his wife's terminal illness, he finds solace in nature where he and all his pain and sadness are accepted without question. Jeff points out that the interdependence of his relationship with nature is critical to his well-being experience. He realizes that he is part of the large universe rather than the universe revolving around him. That distinction brings him to a place of wonder as he delights in the beauty of the universe that is beyond imitation. His experience of well-being arises from embracing his place in nature and in the universe:

> It's in the belonging. It's in the fact that I don't have to be the master of my own world and my own life. It's in the humility. Ah . . . humility is a big word for me. To see that I belong. Larger than me. I'm not an autonomous unit on my own.

Jeff relates humility to well-being. Embracing his place in the vastness of all that is around him, gives mastery of his world and of his life to a larger power that is greater

than Jeff. Humility is foundational to his well-being experience. Nature's garden and the human garden become woven together as one within the experience of well-being.

Likewise, McDade (n.d.) connects nature with a human garden when she describes inequalities between gender and race, and between her and others' fight for human justice. She writes:

> Rage flared and embered. At the same time some inner garden within each of us emerged, revealing blooms. I found that rage rose where love was denied, when that which we loved most was desecrated. Singing helped us honour rage as a companion of women's love. (p. 2)

Emotions such as rage can yield the fruits of an inner garden—a flower garden of sorts (McDade). She credits singing with placing rage in an honoured position that nurtured her inner garden rather than destroying all growth. Honouring one's emotions sustains one's inner self. Emotional tension can yield harmony and balance when the source of tension is honoured through creative means such as when connecting with nature.

More to the point is the place of honouring our humanness within the experience of well-being. The well-being experience is reflected in our human gardens—within our gardens of emotions and experiences that are dynamic in their seasons, harmonious in their range of existences, and spiritual in their reflection of peace, joy, and bliss. Lane describes gardens as being metaphors of who we were, are, and will be. I turn, now, to these metaphors.

Garden Metaphors

The metaphors, *garden of Eden,* and, *garden of earthly delights,* relate to pleasures and temptations experienced in contrast with evil or struggles of various dimensions. These metaphors show up within the arts, such as in literature and paintings. For example, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is the title of a 1504 triptych

by Bosch, a Dutch painter. This triptych is an expression of the Biblical reference to the Garden of Eden and contrasts paradise on earth with depictions of hell (Pioch, 2002). When I focus on a picture of this triptych I am caught by my contrasted reactions that reflect the very extremes within the triptych. The outside shutters of the enclosed three-panel painting draw me toward the image of earth. Momentarily, I can imagine a peaceful place in which to live; however the darkened sky alerts me to well-being that may not be sustained. Likewise, my first reaction to the picture with open shutters is one of contrasts. The light-hearted yellows and blues of the left and middle panels evoke a feeling of pleasure, whereas the darker, right panel depicts a place of gloom. Because of the quietude expressed in the left panel, I experience a sense of peace when I focus on that part of the triptych. The busy figures of the middle panel elicit feelings of anxiety within me. Although the scene is one of joy and laughter, the lack of solitude for any person or creature highlights pleasures in lieu of well-being. In contrast with the left panel, the right panel is both busy and disturbing in its portrayal of evil in all manner of places. Collectively, the three panels and the outside shutters that enclose the panels are expressions of variations in life and, ultimately, point toward the human struggle to experience well-being.

Another reference to the garden of earthly delights metaphor is in Oates' book by the same name (Shulevitz, 2003). Shulevitz reviews this book in the New York Times and describes this story as including good and evil amidst temptations. The story contrasts an automobile accident during inclement weather, with the festive atmosphere that arose because of related work-delays and from the lack of injuries that occurred. Oates' revised, 2003, edition of the same book yields a modernization of the same

story (Shulevitz). Again, the contrasts stand out, this time within Oates' story. It is not the accident in this story that holds my attention but, rather, the festive atmosphere that nurtures my sense of hope that good can come from great difficulties. In Oates' story, the good nature of people foster aspects of well-being for the people involved in the accident and for the community of people who come to the assistance of the accident victims.

Although no specific mention is made to opposites in the metaphors themselves, literature and the arts reflect these opposites. McDade's (n.d.) description of the "rage rose" (p. 3) that bloomed with the honouring of rage, provides insight into the notion of opposites and ways to dwell within those opposites. These metaphors point toward beauty shining through difficulties, and harmony that reflects a balance between opposites. I turn again to Aoki's (1986) writing about the zone of tension in the space of difference where possibilities abound. Well-being is revealed in this dwelling space.

The metaphor, *midnight in the garden of good and evil*, is the basis of a nonfiction book by the same name, written by Berendt (1994), and a 1997 movie adaptation of this book (Maslin, 1997). As for the previous metaphors, this one also is an expression of opposites. The story depicts a crime in the Old South where good and evil underlie close community relationships. The human struggle between good and evil that is foremost in this story foreshadows the possibility of well-being arising from this struggle.

Frankl's (1946/1959) autobiographical writing about his experience in an internment camp is relevant, here. His story is similar to the story by Berendt (1994) in

that Frankl emphasizes possibilities regardless of living within a confined space and traumatic place. Frankl also highlights the dichotomy of the human struggle between good and evil. His sparse and cruel surroundings in the internment camp are not what one would readily consider to contribute to the experience of well-being. However, even in that camp, Frankl describes connecting with the earth and connecting with certain people. The man who gave him bread moved Frankl toward experiencing what the men and women in this study describe as well-being. According to Frankl, "it was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human 'something' which this man also gave to me—the word and look which accompanied the gift" (p. 108). Frankl describes the power of human connection amidst his human struggle. Frankl's description echoes the experience of well-being that arises from and within the connectedness between people.

Garden metaphors provide insight into understanding the experience of well-being. Opposites are pivotal in creating a place of harmony and balance in nature and in human struggles. It is not the action of giving up or embracing one side of a struggle over another that leads to well-being. Rather, one's way of being in a garden and engaging in the gardening process affects a person's experience of well-being (Lane, 2004).

All the people I interviewed relate their experiences of well-being to their relationship with nature. Jeff becomes one with and communes with nature in his journey to come home to self during his wife's struggle with cancer. Alan becomes mindful of himself and his running while embracing his relationship with nature. Mary Ann experiences peace and contentment when she works in her garden. Ann creates a

garden space to commune with nature and people around her. Jeanette's well-being experience is connected with nature through the metaphor of nature's *stepping-stones*.

The experience of well-being arises from relationships with nature, play, and creative expression. This connection becomes a way of communing in a spiritual way with all that nature, play, and creative expression offer the human soul. With a view toward spirituality, well-being is seen as an expression of one's past, present, and future horizons as one dwells in spiritual space.

Dwelling in Spiritual Space

The men and women I interviewed describe the spiritual aspect of their well-being experiences. As they dwell in spiritual space, their relationships with themselves strengthen as do their relationships with others and, in particular, with nature. They describe a strengthening energy that they tap into when they dwell in spiritual space. Jeff's relationship with himself is strengthened by his awareness of his personal energy. He comments, "I had to realize my own energy was mine. It wasn't somewhere else. I had to find it in myself, from my soul and from God's presence in me." Jeanette expresses a similar experience when she focuses on being thankful for a moment of communication with someone, or of a moment of joy. She says, "I acknowledge it. I don't strive to have what other people have. What I want to do is be the best person that I can be and discover what God wants for me to do in this world, and stay connected with that." It is important to Jeanette to connect with God's presence in order to connect with herself. Both Jeff and Jeanette relate their awareness of themselves, their spirituality, and their connection with God, as being important aspects of coming to know themselves deeply. Although they focus on being in

relationship with themselves, their relationship does not come out of a selfish focus. Instead, their focus on themselves becomes a way for them to tap into the life force within themselves in order to be in relationship with the world.

Spiritual Life Force

When Jeff describes this life force, he says "God's life is welling up within me from the inside out, at the core of my being. I'm being loved into being and the energy of God's life is flowing through me like a river." According to Jeff, this personal awareness is a way of "coming home" to himself.

In comparison, Jeanette experiences well-being through prayer. She relates being in prayer to being in a special place. Jeanette explains:

> Because I pray every day, that's how I get to my special place. Other people may find it in different ways. Some people may find it through meditation or through walking in nature. I've done all those other ways. And the deepest connection I've ever had is when I finally gave myself to God and said, "That's it." I'm not just sticking my big toe in the water. My writing has changed. My singing has changed. My performing has changed.

Jeanette's experience of well-being emanates from her spiritual connection with God and coming to know herself in a new way. She comes to this new understanding of herself through prayer. She becomes mindful of herself in relation with others and in relation to her singing and song-writing.

In contrast with Jeanette's experience, Mary Ann describes the lowest ebb in her life:

> By the time I got my divorce, I knew my spirit was absolutely hardly flickering. I was the walking dead. So I knew I had to work on my emotional health and my mental health. I had done nothing but walk the walk with this mentally ill man who was an alcoholic.

Being victimized over the lifetime of her marriage and, at the same time, supporting her husband amidst his struggle with mental illness and alcoholism, she forgets to care for herself. She nearly loses the will to live and, yet, Mary Ann reaches into the depth of her being to kindle a tiny ember—her spirit. Her experience resembles Winnie's (Tomm et al., 1995) experience of soul loss.

Winnie describes a time during which she was in hospital due to her struggle with cancer and she recalls experiencing "soul loss" (Tomm et al., 1995, p. 8). She is describing an experience that is far from the experience of well-being. She writes:

> I was living without soul as far as I could and still be living. It was when I was in the Intensive Care Unit. I had tubes down and around me everywhere. I was tied to the bed so I couldn't move and I couldn't do anything, except gag. I was by myself because they wouldn't let Karl be in the room overnight. There were all these people like me lined up all around the walls on these beds, in this intensive care unit, and the nurses were in the stations surrounded by glass or plastic. We had our monitoring things above us. I didn't have any sense of being an individuated character at all, just none . . . . I had no capacity for reflection, nothing . . . . I didn't have any sense of trying to stay alive. (Tomm et al., p. 8)

Winnie's experience of being alone in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is very different from my hospital experience. She is tied down and she is not allowed to have her husband stay with her overnight. The nurses, too, are separated from Winnie in a seemingly protective bubble. Winnie is alone. In that aloneness she moves toward losing her humanness, toward giving up on life and toward experiencing loss of soul. Her experience of not trying to stay alive resembles Mary Ann's experience of being the walking dead before she realizes she can positively influence her own life.

Winnie describes loss of soul as feeling as if she is no longer an individuated person. She says it is as if she is "a log, a *no thing*" (Tomm et al., p. 9). During my hospital experience of being totally paralyzed, I became fully aware of being in

relationship with the nurses and with family. Although my family was restricted to visiting during specific hours, I did not feel alone. I felt as if I was at home. The nurses were nearby and they nurtured me in a relational space. I experienced well-being within that relational space and, perhaps, because of those relationships I felt safe to move inside myself. I spent much of my time in reflection on my past, present, and future. The horizons of my life sustained my life and living. I experienced well-being by dwelling in spiritual space. I was completely paralyzed; however I was energized beyond my physical abilities. I was energized with a soulful energy that kept my spirits soaring. This felt energy nurtured my ongoing experience of well-being.

Sartre's (1943/1984) description of nothingness relates to Winnie's (Tomm et al., 1995) reference to being a no-thing. When she is separated from her husband and when the nurses monitor her from a distance, the other's gaze places her as object, taking away her ability to see herself anew. Winnie is hampered in her ability to come to know herself through what is missing in her world. It is as if the nurses' gaze apprehends her soul. She comes to experience no life energy and an inability to reflect, similar to Mary Ann's experience of her spirit barely flickering. She is as far from experiencing well-being as any soul can be and still be alive.

Later on in her discussion, Winnie (Tomm et al., 1995) explains that when she no longer is in hospital, she enters a place of "knowing [herself] differently" (p. 10). She goes on to say, "Almost all of my energy goes into experiencing myself" (Tomm et al., p. 10). "I feel very calm about this" (Tomm et al., p. 10). She moves to a place of experiencing herself in the world rather than being lost to the gaze of others. In this

place she reflects on the past, present, and future horizons of her life. Winnie's comment relates to Jeanette's comment about coming to know herself differently by connecting with the audience in a shared human relationship. In particular, Winnie states, "I feel I have a tremendous amount of centredness that comes from the spiritual journey that I've done and the spiritual guides that I've received" (Tomm et al., p. 4). Jeanette, Winnie, and Jeff, relate their experiences of well-being to their personal, spiritual journeys.

Similar to Mary Ann's and Winnie's (Tomm et al., 1995) experiences, Helen Keller (2003) offers her view of living in the grasp of nothingness. Keller's description of her experience of being blind and deaf is an expression of her shift from living in an incomplete world, to embracing all manner of possibilities. She experiences nothingness before she discovers herself:

> Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was a no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew aught, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus. I had a mind which caused me to feel anger, satisfaction, desire. These two facts led those about me to suppose that I willed and thought. I can remember all this, not because I knew that it was so, but because I have tactual memory. It enables me to remember that I never contracted my forehead in the act of thinking. I never viewed anything beforehand or chose it. I also recall tactually the fact that never in a start of the body or a heart-beat did I feel that I loved or cared for anything. My inner life, then, was a blank without past, present, or future, without hope or anticipation, without wonder or joy or faith. (Keller, 2003, p. 72)

Keller experiences nothingness when she lives in body but not in spirit. A range of human emotions emerge from this no-world experience that does not include caring for anything. Lack of caring emotions underlies her inability to experience the blended horizon of past, present, and future. By not engaging in caring relationships with

anything or anyone, including herself, Keller does not experience a sense of well-being.

Keller's (2003) life and world come alive at the moment that she makes the connection between words and objects. At age 12 she wrote of this connection:

> Some one was pumping water, and as the cool, fresh stream burst forth, teacher made me put my mug under the spout and spelled w-a-t-e-r. Water!
>
> That word startled my soul, and it awoke, full of the spirit of the morning, full of joyous, exultant song. Until that day my mind had been like a darkened chamber, waiting for words to enter and light the lamp, which is thought. (Keller, 2003, p. 169)

Words connect Keller with her world. Words come alive through the touch of one human to another. The human touch that brings words alive for Keller is like a lifeline that connects her to all that was around and about and within her. Keller's journey toward experiencing well-being begins when she internalizes the connection between words and objects. She internalizes this connection via a tactile understanding. It is as if her touching of words touches her soul and forms a bridge between herself and her world. Keller enters into a relationship with her world, a relationship through which she comes to experience what is being described by the people who are exemplars in this study as well-being.

Similar to Keller's (2003) description, Moore (1992) describes a woman's experience of making deep internal connections during her journey toward well-being. She has a very painful illness that is terminal. In the midst of her illness she becomes deeply depressed and looses the faith that has kept her strong. She journeys to the depths of her inner self where she discovers a faith that she experiences as being very different from anything she has ever experienced in the past. From this new faith the

woman "uncovered a profound peace" (Moore, p. 257) and she realizes that this new faith is "tied closer than can be imagined to her own identity and to her illness" (Moore, p. 257). She discovers herself anew. Moore indicates that the woman died in peace soon after she tells him of her story.

This woman journeys from the darkness of her depression to dwelling in a spiritual place that enables her to die in peace. Frankl (1946/1959) describes a similar experience. Reflecting on his release from prison, Frankl highlights a moment when he deliberately prays to God: "I called to the Lord from my narrow prison and He answered me in the freedom of space" (p. 111). Frankl continues saying, "I know that on that day, in that hour, my new life started. Step for step I progressed, until I again became a human being" (p. 111). He writes, too, of his journey toward experiencing an "inward peace" (Frankl, p. 79) after taking control of his fate. This spiritual connection becomes his lifeline to reclaim his humanness during the destructive forces of war. Frankl, as did the woman described by Moore (1992) and the people in this study, pays attention to inner peace that is descriptive of the lived experience of well-being. Peace emerges from a shift away from egotism, toward embracing one's spirituality. Emerson (1971) notes this shift:

> Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (Emerson, p. 10)

Emerson relates one's spiritual connections with coming to know oneself in a new way where egotism is replaced by a deep spiritual connection with the universe that, in turn, shows up as well-being. Likewise for Jeanette, when she moves away from egotism,

her view of herself and of her world, changes. She comes to experience well-being through her newfound spiritual relationship with herself, her family, and the audiences for whom she sings. Jeff says "Well-being is part of my prayer experience when I am open and present and silently being born. I spend time in prayer to just be quiet and receive." His centring experience comes from spending time in centring prayer. In this quiet time he experiences well-being as being born.

Nature and Spirituality

Struggles of various kinds, whether during creativity such as gardening and/or in day-to-day life, open the self to understanding the world and one's place in the world. Maser (2005) says that it is through such a struggle that he comes to understand the "intrinsic wholeness of Nature . . . and [himself] as a quintessential part thereof (p. 19). We are human beings wholly connected with everything and everyone. This profound connection reflects a spiritual connection between self and the world.

Jeff's experience of well-being comes out of a spiritual presencing and centring especially when he is in nature and in relationship with nature. Jeff explains:

> Sometimes when I go for a walk I just walk for exercise. At other times when I'm going for a walk, I look at the foxglove and just say, "Wow." Or I think, "Isn't that vine neat?" I want to be present to it. When I am present to whatever is around me, that's more meditative and therefore it seems more centring to me. There is something about being beyond human constructed experience that is just here. Everything is accepted. I'm here and nature accepts me. It has no boundaries and in that sense it invites me to accept my own boundaries and not be self-sufficient and not try to order containment. It just invites me to enter into it. It's in the belonging. It's in the humility of belonging with something larger than me. On the other side it is embracing while letting go.

Jeff notes the distinction between embracing nature while it embraces him. In that embrace he lets go of his concerns and of his worldly connections. There are no

divisions between Jeff and nature when he experiences well-being. Instead, this melding of one into the other becomes an invitation for Jeff to accept his limitations and to be open to receiving the world by freely entering into it. He distinguishes between walking in nature and dwelling in spiritual space in nature. In spiritual space, Jeff goes beyond merely walking. He appreciates the extraordinary wonder of nature and experiences a strong desire to be present to all that is about him. Being present is a centring experience for Jeff. It has nothing to do with boundaries. It has everything to do with accepting the invitation to enter into the wonders that surround him. "You can't embrace without letting go. But it's not just the letting go. It's the embracing of what you experience in the natural world. It embraces you and you embrace it." He dwells amidst contrasts of humility and letting go; well-being is experienced in the delicate balance between the two.

Mary Ann describes that her well-being experience comes from a blend of talking out her difficulties plus mediating:

> Oh, I was able to talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. Thank God I had more than one friend because I didn't at least take the time up of one friend. I had many, so that I could just work it out. It was almost like vomiting it out. That's how I got started feeding my soul.

Talking to friends becomes a way for her to release years of pent-up feelings. This release is a way for her to nurture her soul when she makes room for the nurturing experience of meditating. Earlier I described that talking and focusing on the sunrises, work together to enrich Mary Ann's soul. Similar to Jeff's experience, Mary Ann says that meditating to experience well-being yields "calmness." She continues on to say of her morning commune, it is "being aware. When finally you can be on your own and just think about these things. I like watching the sun rise and being able to journal. That

was spiritual. That was the beginning." Focusing on the sunrise in a meditative way brings her a sense of calm. All the while that she slowly moves toward well-being, she is ridding herself of a lifetime of being a victim. She feeds her soul each morning through her connection with the sunrises and through meditation. Her journey toward well-being is a spiritual journey of gradual change that reflects elements of transition.

Well-being is experienced when connecting with nature and its innate beauty. Emerson (1971) explains, "In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (p. 10). We are not separate from nature but, rather, one with nature, and we are in harmony with all that is in nature. Emerson is describing a spiritual connection with nature's beauty. He goes on to say, in [the] eternal calm [of the sky and the woods], he finds himself. The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough (Emerson, p. 13). A horizon provides us with a balance between possibilities and stability. The horizon provides a way for people to feel grounded and to feel connected to the earth, although free to reach toward the unending possibilities that a horizon presents.

Mary Ann communes with the sunrises on a daily basis. Jeff becomes one with nature during his walks as he embraces the whole of his universe from the tiny vine to the majestic forest. Beauty arises for the person by being open to its existence. "This beauty of Nature which is seen and felt as beauty, is the least part. The shows of the day . . . if too eagerly hunted, become shows merely, and mock us with their unreality" (Emerson, 1971, p. 14). Well-being, too, arises out of an openness and freedom, rather

than out of being forced to exist. When speaking of beauty, Emerson points out that "the high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will, and never separate" (p. 15). Nature's beauty, as a spiritual beauty, is experienced by people in relation to the human will that is at their core. Returning to the etymology of well-being, it contains a will to exist. A fine balance is in the experience of well-being, just as it is in nature's beauty. "Therefore does beauty, which, in relation to actions, as we have seen, comes unsought, and comes because it is unsought, remain for the apprehension and pursuit of the intellect" (Emerson, p. 16). Nature's beauty, like well-being, comes from being open to the mystery of its existence. Nature is expressed as harmony within all its forms and existence. This harmony shows up as beauty. "Nature is a sea of forms radically alike and even unique . . . . What is common to them all,—that perfectness and harmony, is beauty" (Emerson, 1971, p. 17). This description of nature mirrors that of people.

Human beings are unique and, at the same time, they radiate a common beauty from within:

> In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows . . . . Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. (Emerson, pp. 9-10)

The experience of well-being is a harmony of existence expressed as a beauty that emanates from deep inside the person and is expressed as the beauty of peace, contentment, and exhilaration. Emerson is describing a deeply felt feeling that comes out of embracing nature that is powerfully spiritual. Ann's Friendship Garden, with all

its butterflies and vast array of flowers, is an expression of nature's beauty that is grounded in spirituality. Ann experiences well-being through communing in her garden space. I offer that the beauty of humans, as an expression of well-being, is a reflection of wholeness that is gathered up from the distant shores of the person. This beauty shows itself when a person discovers his or her identity in relationships that flourish in this spiritual space.

Connecting with the Universe

Taylor (2002) describes the story of Mary, a woman dying from cancer, and a group of nursing and non-nursing staff, and Mary's niece. To honour Mary's last wish to experience the December rain before she died, the nurses, staff, and Mary's niece pushed Mary, in her bed, onto the landing of the fire escape:

> There we stood: a mix of faiths and skill levels, nursing and non-nursing staff. We were gathered together on a fire landing in the cold rain. Some of us were crying, others were smiling, and some were doing both. All of us were wet and cold and knew we'd have to stay in wet clothes for the rest of the shift. It didn't matter. We knew that we'd given Mary an important gift by ministering to the spirit within her that wanted to go out in the rain one more time. (Taylor, 2002, p. 266)

From her unresponsive state, "Mary's eyes opened wide and her face brightened" (Taylor, 2002, p. 266). Mary's expression reflects well-being despite her imminent death. She experiences an uplifting of her spirit as she communes with nature. This special action of being in the rain and being one with nature is a spiritual experience so powerful for Mary that a transition can be seen all over her face. It is as if Mary has moved into a place where her spirit connects with the universe. When she once again communes with the rain, she experiences a sense of well-being in her time of death.

Focusing on nature, Maser (2005) writes, "It is spiritual succor that I find in my garden when the burdens of the outer world grow too heavy for my shoulders. It is here that I kneel before the Eternal Mystery and find peace in turning the soil and in weeding" (p. 19). He describes his special and individual relationship with his garden. This peaceful experience does not arise from merely watching the garden from the outside but, instead, by convening with the garden and engaging in the process of gardening. Maser's closeness to his garden opens spaces for him to slip into his spiritual space.

Deep human connections with one's world underlie the spiritual nature of well-being. "The more deeply our work stirs imagination and corresponds to images that lie there at the bedrock of identity and fate, the more it will have soul" (Moore, 1992, p. 185). The soul of the person and the soul of one's work are interwoven. "Work is fundamental to the [soul's] opus because the whole point of life is the fabrication of soul" (Moore, p. 185). Moore's comments reveal that soul shines through to the surface of the person as an expression of well-being, like an ember that reflects life deep inside the person. Describing his gardening experience, Maser (2005) states, "It is while weeding that my inner vision shifts, and I often see my garden not as an infinitesimal place in the world, but rather the world as an infinitesimal place in my garden" (p. 19). Well-being shows up in one's accomplishments that are achieved through labour, work, toil, or struggle—whatever word one chooses to use. One's world is reflected in one's garden. "Work is an attempt to find an adequate alchemy that both wakens and satisfies the very root of being" (Moore, p. 185). Wakening and satisfying underlie a loving relationship with oneself, others, and one's world. This relationship is dynamic

in nature and speaks to a way of being at the core of the experience of well-being. It is reached by connecting with the universe and embracing a spiritual transition where we experience seeing and being differently. Love plays a part in this experience.

Love and Well-Being

Returning to the image of the river (Hanh, 1991), it shows the way toward understanding the experience of well-being. A loving connection exists between the river and the clouds. The river comes to realize that she shares a life-force—water—with the clouds; they are separate, yet as one. When the river honours the clouds and her rhythmic interconnection with clouds and all that exists around her, the river comes to experience a sense of peace and quietude. The river in all its worldly travels experiences well-being when she embraces her dynamic interconnection with herself and with the world.

Alan and Jeff specifically focus on love within their experiences of well-being. Alan says, "Everything you do together seems so marvelous and so unforgettable. It is a time of exhilaration and wonder." Being in love contributes to a person's feeling of well-being that, for Alan, will always be something he will remember. The energized feeling of love and the unexplainable nature of love are qualities within the experience of well-being. Jeff describes love as being within his experience of well-being. A particular love experience comes over him while he is alone with and feeling the power of nature:

> It was like the world is incredible and I just want to make love to it. I wanted to make love to me. I just had this huge longing to be in union with everything. Then after awhile it kind of subsided. It was a very spiritual moment. I've had significant moments of huge well-being. The other side of the coin is that I think I am learning to live in it more freely.

Jeff's experience of well-being is inextricably woven into his experience of love of the world and of himself as part of the world. He describes this experience as being momentary and, at the same time, significant in influencing his well-being. This love experience is a spiritual experience underlying well-being. Over time he is noticing these powerful moments and coming to freely embrace them as part of his well-being experience.

Winnie (Tomm et al., 1995) offers another perspective of love within well-being that relates to Mary Ann's experience of taking time to focus on the sunrises. Winnie says, "One thing I am experiencing now, really passionately, are the sunrises and the sunsets" (Tomm et al., 1995, p. 11). She continues to say:

> I think I am getting a different idea about love . . . . It is not that I am really excited about this or that. Instead, it is so inside me that I don't say I love something. It is just that I am absorbed into it. So there is a different way of being that I am experiencing now. (Tomm et al. p. 11)

Winnie describes her love experience as being deep inside her and drawing her inside. It is not something particular that she can name. Rather, her love experience is all-encompassing. Jeff's and Winnie's experiences of love and well-being reflect Maslow's (1976) description of peak experiences where a person perceives his or her unique place within the whole of the universe. According to Maslow (1976), one's faith can assist a person to make sense of peak experiences. However, the experience of well-being differs from peak experiences in that well-being shows up in a range of life experiences, including occurrences that resemble one's feeling of being with the universe. Well-being shows up in coming to know oneself on the journey toward this phenomenon. Likewise, for peak experiences, well-being shows up in significant moments in time. Specific to well-being, however, those moments can extend in time

through one's connections with the world during a range of experiences that include struggles in one's life. These connections with the world give possibility to living freely in moments of well-being.

Mary Ann tells of her love of an animal that helped her connect with the world and move toward and sustain her experience of well-being:

> Feeling empowered and doing all these things for myself just made me feel on top of the world. And then I went out and got a puppy. She brings me a lot of peace. I love her to bits.
>
> I had a bad fall four years ago and I really injured my knee. Four months before that my ex-husband had committed suicide. All of this happened within four months. So, here I am again, feeling really, really lonely and really down, down-in-the-dumps. One day I just said to myself, "I'm going to get a puppy." I've had a dog all my life so it wasn't anything new. So I knew what kind I wanted. And when I went out and got her on July 25th and, brought her home, oh my goodness, that gave me something to do. It brought me out of myself. It gave me something to look after. She drove me nuts for the first six months. But she's four years old now and she's the Queen of the house.
>
> She brought me a lot of ...ot feeling lonely. She's better, I said to myself, better than a man. Doesn't require the taking care of. And she doesn't bark and snap at me. She just loves me, loves me the way I am.
>
> I had two affairs in my marriage after 20 years of being married. I was looking for love in all the wrong places. I was searching for this well-being. I call it peace and contentment. I have found it now. And you know, I tell people there's no price you can put on that feeling. There's just that feeling of contentment.

Mary Ann experiences extreme loneliness and feeling down following an eventful four months during which her husband died and she injured her knee. Reflecting on her previous experience of having a dog, Mary Ann instinctively knows that having a puppy would help her deal with her depressed feelings. She points out that the activity associated with having a puppy drew her out of her depressed state. The love she experiences from her puppy fills her life such that Mary Ann's feelings of loneliness

subside. In particular, the puppy accepts Mary Ann and does not expect her to change, unlike her husband's expectations while they were living together. By being accepted for who she is, Mary Ann experiences well-being that she describes as feelings of peace and contentment. She points out that her search for love through affairs was actually her search for well-being. She experiences well-being through a different kind of relationship. Mary Ann comes to experience this phenomenon when she is loved for herself amidst an environment of peace and contentment.

Well-being is experienced in relationships between people when accompanied by forgiveness. Mary Ann describes this connection when she refers to her husband:

> I was so angry and so bitter. Journaling helped me get rid of those emotions and I think forgiveness was the biggest thing that helped me feel contented and peaceful. We were able to make amends to one another before he died.

She no longer harbours anger and resentment about the past. Journaling is a way for her to let go of her feelings of anger. Forgiveness allows her to move forward on her well-being journey. Although she felt victimized in her marriage, Mary Ann counts forgiveness in their relationship before her husband died, as being significant in her experience of well-being. They parted in peace and she moved onward as if taking that sense of peace with her.

The people I interviewed describe various friendships that extend to community relationships and close personal relationships, all which demonstrate loving relationships that contribute to their experiences of well-being. Frankl (1946/1959) brings love together with the saving grace of humans despite their circumstances. Beyond his feeling of peace, Frankl highlights the notion of love as being a feeling of bliss. He said he "understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may

know bliss" (Frankl, p. 57). According to Frankl, "the salvation of man is through love and in love" (p. 57). He experiences well-being as a reflection of what the people in this study describe. Giving and receiving a gift of human connection becomes far more than receiving a piece of bread. It leads toward a sense of well-being. Olthuis' (2001) reference to dancing, unites a person's experience of the miracle of love with the dance of love. The gift of human connection to which Fankl refers becomes the dance of love that opens for him the miracle of love—the miracle of well-being.

Frankl's (1946/1959) experience emerges through a loving connection between humans. In the following quote, Frankl provides an example of a moment of well-being that he experiences during a very bleak time and place. This moment is one of peace and contentment associated with the experience of well-being that arises out of a felt connection with another human being. This spiritual experience relates to the life force within nature:

> Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes" in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. "Et lux in tenebris lucet"—and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil that I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me. (Frankl, pp. 60-61)

Frankl is remarkably calm in the midst of danger. His feelings of peace and contentment arise out of an immensely strong and powerful spiritual connection with his wife. The energy of this connection comes from the life force of the bird that enters his world and joins him through an intensely moving and deeply intimate gaze. This gaze is vastly different than the apprehending gaze described earlier in reference to when Winnie spends time in the ICU. The power of connections between people, and between people and nature gives rise to the experience of well-being that extends beyond a specific moment and that evokes a connection between the self and the soul.

Moore (1992) explains:

> Soul is not about transcendence. Soul-yoga wants more intimacy between consciousness and the soul, between our body and the world's body, and between ourselves and our fellow human beings. It basks in the imagination its methods bring, without expecting images and memories to take it toward any goal of improvement. (pp. 173-174)

It is not about transcending above anything; it is about intimate connections. Those connections are between our conscious thinking related to our soulful being, between our human body and that of the world including nature, and between ourselves and others in deep human relationships. The experience of well-being is a soulful experience that emerges in a free space where there are no expectations of what will come. It involves being open to receive what is and what can be. Well-being is about coming home to self in relationship with self, others, and the world. Well-being is experienced in the freedom of spiritual space.

Space, whether it is that of play space, creative space, nature's space, or spiritual space, brings attention to dwelling in those places. Heidegger (1993) relates dwelling, to remaining in a place and, in particular, to being at peace in that place. "To

dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing" (Heidegger, 1993, p. 351). He brings attention to our dwelling on this earth and, thus, to our shared human dwelling that unites us with our whole world. This shared human dwelling shows up as peace and contentment that is experienced as freedom within one's world. This felt freedom underlies the experience of well-being.

Well-being is dwelling in lived-space that reflects coming home to self. It involves being at home, all the while learning how to build and grow. Heidegger (1993) points out that "we do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell" (p. 350). We dwell in more than mere space. Instead, we dwell in "locales" (Heidegger, 1993, p, 356) to which we connect in a meaningful way and in a relational way with ourselves, others, and the world as a whole. Ann, Alan, Jeff, Mary Ann, and Jeanette tell their stories of dwelling in locales that become their lived experiences of well-being. When they forget to be and to live, they do not experience well-being. In contrast, they experience well-being when they become open to dwelling in their worlds regardless of circumstances. Well-being involves building in relational locals that unite earth, sky, spiritual essences and us in a self-forgetful way.

A Story of Well-Being

The Secret Garden (Burnett, 1994) is a story of transitioning toward well-being. When Mary becomes an orphan at the age of 10, she is sent from her home in India to stay with her uncle, Mr. Craven, in England. His wife died 10 years earlier while

giving birth to their son, Colin. She had loved gardening. At the time of her death, Mr. Craven locked his wife's special garden and buried the key.

Their home is palatial and employs many servants. Mr. Craven, however, lives a secluded life not only because of his tremendous grief related to the loss of his wife but, also, because of his self-consciousness about his "hunchback" (p. 10). Mr. Craven's concern over his appearance contributes to isolating his son. It is well-known in their home and in the community that Mr. Craven's son is being hidden from the public out of fear that he, too, will inherit the same physical disability as his father. Colin lived for 10 years, all the while preparing to die. His fear of developing this disability rather than the actual occurrence of this disability nearly costs him his life.

Mary is a precocious, obstinate, and curious child who is not content to sit idly day-after-day. Finding the locked garden becomes her mission. A robin eventually leads Mary to the secret garden and with the help of a friend, 12-year-old Dickon, the garden comes back to life. Upon Colin's first visit to the garden, his outward expression and demeanour change. "He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of colour had actually crept all over him—ivory face and neck and hands and all" (p. 214). In contrast to his negative thinking that precedes his first journey to the garden, Colin remarks, "I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself" (p. 221). His visits to the garden help him forget about his health concerns and, instead, he focuses on the beauty of nature and on what is possible for him to achieve.

Colin embraces the garden and all it offers him and all that stirs within him. He describes these changes in the garden and in himself as being "Magic" (p. 232).

> When Mary found this garden it looked quite dead . . . . Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing. One day things weren't there and another they were. I had never watched things before, and it made me feel very curious. Scientific people are always curious, and I am going to be scientific. I keep saying to myself: "What is it? What is it?" It's something. It can't be nothing! I don't know its name so I call it Magic. I have never seen the sun rise, but Mary and Dickon have, and from what they tell me I am sure that is Magic, too. Something pushes it up and draws it. Sometimes, since I've been in the garden I've looked up through the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy as if something were pushing and drawing in my chest and making me breathe fast. Magic is always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing. Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it must be all around us. In this garden—in all the places. The Magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man. (pp. 239-240)

His description of Magic continues in the form of a chant:

> The sun is shining—the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing—the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is the Magic—being strong is the Magic. The Magic is in me—the Magic is in me. It is in me—it is in me. It's in every one of us. (p. 243)

Colin is describing the lived experience of well-being. It is in every one of us, just as breathing is a part of being alive. We are one with the world in a rhythmic interchange. The nature of well-being is a breathing of life into the very soul of a person in relationship with the world.

CHAPTER 7: RHYTHMIC INTERCHANGE OF WELL-BEING

> Isn't it like breathing, this constant interchange
> between attachment and relinquishing,
> when something barely was, and, vanishing,
> is recollected in a nearby face?
>
> World and face: how they displace each other,
> and seldom look alike–neither winning . . .
> I found the distant slopes fulfilling
> yesterday. Today I need not bother
>
> with looking up, or speaking. (Rilke, 2004, p. 135)

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Rilke's poem points toward well-being as a phenomenon that arises from the natural rhythm of breathing. Bodily breathing is expressed as connecting and releasing between oneself and the world as if they are one. The self and world are deeply interwoven; at times they are indistinguishable. The essence of well-being lies in this deeply woven masterpiece of life.

Good's commentary says that each person is in relationship with the world in a way that is "as natural as breathing" (Rilke, p. 181). He goes on to say that it is up to us to respond to the joys of the world; those responses show themselves in our faces. According to Good (Rilke), if we ignore those opportunities we may, instead, see the responses to our world in the faces of other people. It is apparent that our searching and discovering become part of life itself. The way that we dwell in and respond to the world is significant in the way that we experience being in the world. This constant interchange between people and their world is continuous although it does not

necessarily show up with each observation of the world. By ignoring our surroundings we can miss opportunities to enjoy the world, our place in it, and the experience of well-being. Our relationship with ourselves, others, and the world is a dynamically rhythmic interchange at the core of the experience of well-being. A rhythmic interchange exists between our paying attention to the world and paying attention to ourselves. This interchange reflects the rhythmic interchange in breathing.

Letting Go to Breathe

It is not a letting go of life difficulties that underlies the experience of well-being but, instead, freely connecting with oneself and the universe that leads to letting go to breathe. Moore (1992) emphasizes that "the ensouled body is in communion with the body of the world and finds its health in that intimacy" (p. 173). This deep connection between body and world reflects what the people in this study are describing as well-being. Perhaps health, in Moore's quote is closer to the phenomenon of well-being. He speaks about soul as being the essence of the person:

> When we relate to our bodies as having soul, we attend to their beauty, their poetry and their expressiveness. Our very habit of treating the body as a machine, whose muscles are like pulleys and its organs engines, forces its poetry underground, so that we experience the body as an instrument and see its poetics only in illness. (Moore, p. 172)

We tend to pay attention to the body when it is not working or when we do not experience well-being. Returning to Heidegger's (1927/1962) description of a hammer, we tend not to notice the working of things, including the body, until it is broken, stressed, or generally not functioning as we have come to expect. Illness and other difficulties serve to bring the body to our attention and, thus, bring our lives and our living, our human poetry, to our attention. The experience of well-being allows us the

opportunity to become aware of our human poetry captured in times of peaceful living, and in expressions of deep joy of life amidst struggles and day-to-day activities. Paying attention is not paying attention at all costs that would diminish or undermine this phenomenon. Paying attention means to come to appreciate the experience of well-being by self-reflecting on that experience and allowing well-being to exist. It is experienced by letting go of one's focus on the specifics of one's life in order to engage freely in the breathing of well-being.

Breathing—the rhythm of life. My attention returns to my illness experience when for more than four weeks, I breathed with the assistance of a ventilator. When the time came for me to be weaned from my ventilator, I discovered I had "forgotten" how to breathe. It was not that I was unable to breathe. Instead, I had forgotten the rhythmic nature of breathing. I had lost my natural ability to rhythmically inhale and exhale according to my respiratory needs. In response to this experience of something missing from my abilities, I paid full attention to my breathing and further undermined my ability to breathe on my own. Instinctively, I created ways to breathe by mirroring the rhythmicity of others' breathing or by following the rhythmicity of the music on the radio. However, when those people moved away from my bedside, or when the beat of the music was faster than the normal rate of breathing, my own breathing rhythm became increasingly unnatural, on some occasions drawing the attention of nurses and physicians. Gradually, as I came to focus my attention on other areas of my recovery such as embracing my very gradual independence, my breathing returned to its natural rhythm. Although I was unaware of any specific affect my variable breathing rhythm

had on my sense of well-being beyond the critical role of keeping me alive, *rhythmic breathing*, itself, is a metaphor for my experience of this phenomenon.

Lane (2004) adds another perspective to rhythmicity; he joins the notions of surrendering and letting out. Lane says, "The garden I imagined had always been there inside me. It just needed letting out" (p. 145). When the garden is let out of him, he shows to himself and to the world, the possibilities of experiencing well-being. "I allow myself wonder as I always have" (Lane, p. 91). Wonder and possibilities become one for Lane. He continues on to say:

> I remember that moment at the treatment centre when I said, *I surrender*, to the starry night. It was such a simple moment, yet one I'd yearned for all my life . . . . I had never been able to let go of myself.
>
> My surrender was just a moment, perhaps a few seconds of looking up into the night sky, and then I walked on into the treatment centre and started to live. (Lane, p. 91)

The simplicity of the moment of his surrender stands as a peaceful moment in contrast with the years of standing strong against this release. However, he had ached for this moment his whole life. The universe literally called him to let go and he answered that call in union with the bright night sky. He surrendered to the possibility of experiencing well-being. "I had struggled against surrender all my life. It took sixty years of dying to finally be alive" (Lane, p. 91). Lane's reference to finally being alive is a striking statement against the backdrop of his sixty years of life. By surrendering his life, he regained his life.

The stories of the people I interviewed and the stories of the people in the literature show that well-being has a natural rhythm. When we turn inward and outward to experience well-being we do so in a rhythmic way. Turning inward and

outward become ways of letting go to breathe. Jeff surrendered to the wonders of nature to come home to himself. Alan let go of his focus on the goal of finishing a race and, instead, communed with his connection with the world. Mary Ann let go of being a victim to evolve into an individuated person. Ann let go of her fight to battle cancer in order to enjoy her remaining days on this earth. Jeanette let go of her self-focused response to audiences and, in return, experienced a sense of peace that turned into a reciprocal giving and receiving. The fine balance of breathing echoes the fine balance of well-being—a balanced relationship between body, mind, spirit, soul, nature, and humankind. This balance mirrors Heraclitus' notion of unique parts functioning together within the rhythm of the whole (McKirahan, 1994). When this synchronicity is disturbed so, too, is the experience of well-being. The synchronous aspect of this rhythm becomes a balanced interplay that is sustained within a tension between differences. Well-being shows up within the space of difference and shows up as a rhythmic interchange within moments in time. Levertov (1997) describes these moments of well-being;

> I know this happiness
> is provisional:
>
> the looming presences—
> great suffering, great fear—
>
> withdraw only
> into peripheral vision:
>
> but ineluctable this shimmering
> of wind in the blue leaves:
>
> this flood of stillness
> widening the lake of sky:

this need to dance,
this need to kneel:

this mystery: (p. 5)

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Levertov is describing a form of happiness that mirrors well-being. It arises from deep within us and is powerful in drawing a person toward a reverent calm. Well-being is never still as in being lifeless or changeless. It goes to the depth of suffering and fear and then rhythmically turns toward the stillness of life, all the while staying in tune with life difficulties. It is revealed in the stillness of the immense canopy above that calls us to dance. Well-being is an expression of rhythmic breathing expressed as a natural interchange between dancing and pausing in a peaceful place.

The experience of well-being requires a personal drive to exist; it cannot be achieved through purposeful means. Well-being ensues from a person's openness to experience wholeness and to enter a free space of reflection. Well-being is experienced in solitude and, simultaneously, in relationship with self, others, and the world. In one's personal sanctuary, one draws from a personal source of energy that is fed by the rhythm of well-being where turning inward is rhythmically connected with turning outward

Turning Inward and Turning Outward

Experiences of depression and isolation are catalysts for initially turning inward. Jeff turns inward when his wife is dying and after she dies. He turns inward to connect with a spiritual strength deep within himself. Mary Ann turns inward during

and after her marriage and after she leaves this relationship. Her inward turning nurtures her soul, giving her the strength and beginning confidence to shift her perspective beyond herself. Both Mary Ann and Jeff turn inward to reconnect with themselves after experiencing great change and loss in their worlds. Although they turn inward first, they nearly lose themselves in this inward turning before they are able to pay attention to the outside world and eventually experience well-being within themselves. When Jeff and Mary Ann experience being strengthened by turning inward, they then turn toward outside interests. Their turning outward nurtures and further strengthens Jeff and Mary Ann so they can shift their attention back to themselves to experience well-being.

Jeff turns toward nature and toward his family. His response to the joys of the world is experienced as well-being. Jeff's searching and discovering become part of his world as it does for Mary Ann. She turns toward her garden and her friends and creative activities before experiencing well-being. Mary Ann experiences a rhythmically dynamic interchange that is expressed and experienced as well-being.

In contrast, Jeanette, Ann, and Alan begin their well-being journeys from a point of turning outward. Jeanette turns toward music and toward audiences for whom she sings, and out of her turning outward she experiences well-being. Ann turns toward her garden and toward her family and community in order to experience well-being. Alan turns toward his running in nature. In response to this turning, he experiences well-being within himself when his running and being become one.

Jeanette, Ann, and Alan come to a place where they can then move inside themselves to experience well-being. Turning outward in well-being brings to

awareness, one's unique human qualities against the massive backdrop of the world. Turning outward becomes a way for people to see themselves in a new light. Turning outward gives people a new perspective on themselves where they experience well-being within themselves. Jeanette, Ann, and Alan do not deliberately focus outside themselves for this experience. They experience well-being because of their turning outward.

The people I interviewed describe turning inward and turning outward, reflecting an interchange in well-being that almost seems profound. I find I have reached a place that is calling me, once again, to pause and reflect. In some ways it is as if I have stumbled into the heart of this phenomenon, much like discovering the jewel of well-being. While breathing sustains life, an interchange in well-being sustains the very nature of this phenomenon.

An Interchange in Well-Being

A dynamic, rhythmic interchange in well-being occurs back and forth, back and forth as in breathing, back and forth as in sustaining life through an interchange between inner and outer worlds. This interchange opens up free space that fosters a soulful reaching beyond oneself where inner and outer horizons open people to the fullness of the well-being experience. An interchange in well-being is a breathing of the life force that resides deep within each person. An interchange in well-being goes to the depth of human spiritual experience where possibilities abound.

I revisit Frankl's (1946/1959) autobiographical writing where this interchange sets him on a journey to reclaim his humanness. The experience of well-being is coming home to self where a strong connection is created between one's inner and

outer worlds. The interchange in well-being occurs in this conjoined space where, for the people in this study, they come to experience their unique places in the world. This open and free space points toward one's overall being, toward the life force that connects oneself to oneself and to the world. The interchange is a nurturing interchange; here one comes to know oneself differently and deeply. Moving back and forth through and within this space sustains a person in his or her experiencing of well-being and, at the same time, this interchange reflects the experience of well-being itself. This interchange occurs within a conjoined space of difference.

The Conjoined Space Between

The men and women I interviewed come to experience well-being within this space. Their journeys did not stop within this space. The people in this study move back and forth, paying attention to themselves then to the world outside themselves. This conjoined space between inner and outer worlds is the space in which they come to embrace the mystery of well-being. The conjoined space is taken up by a shared relationship between these two worlds from which arises the experience of well-being. The dynamic interplay of back and forth sustains a harmonious balance within this space. Harmonious balance reflects the clearly tuned experience of well-being that unfolds over time.

The Unfolding of Well-Being

Jeanette describes her feelings of well-being as an effortless unfolding as she follows her intuitive sense to plan an event in which she will be singing:

> Being in that sense of well-being, all the doors are open, everything you do requires no effort, requires no cajoling, requires no pleading. It just unfolds. There's a sense of - again I come back to the sense of peace, a

> sense of calmness, a sense of it's the right thing to do. The whole universe is unfolding as it should.

Her sense of well-being comes from feeling as if she is saying or doing the right thing. The whole universe is unfolding as it is meant to do. Well-being does not arise for Jeanette from forcing her world and events in her world to take place. Instead, a sense of movement exists in well-being through a flow that Jeanette experiences both inside and outside of herself, in the in-between where life unfolds effortlessly as if she is free from constraints.

Lane's (2004) description of his garden tells a story of his journey toward well-being as his life-changes slowly reflect the wonders of nature. Lane's garden and he become one throughout his story. Lane says, "There are no accidents, there are no serendipitous moments. There are only fragile interludes of clarity" (p. 305). He is talking about his garden and he is talking about himself. Interludes of clarity highlight interludes of well-being. As the story of his garden unfolds, so too does his experience of well-being in the conjoined space between outer and inner worlds.

Jeff also experiences that well-being arises from inside. He equates well-being with healing. When he is able to let his anguish be, he experiences a sense of healing. According to Jeff, "well-being means that I'm okay in the world and that my life is unfolding and that there's goodness." He says he experiences well-being, not merely in letting go of difficulties in his life but, as in entering freedom. I am reminded of flowers freely unfolding over their lifetime. Vulnerability exists in this unfolding when people trust in the unfolding process that leads toward an unknown future. The experience of well-being involves being free and feeling free to embrace the unfolding of well-being. The experience of well-being is a coming home to self.

Coming Home to Self

The etymological exploration showed that hearth and home are central to family relationships. Coming home to self leads toward experiencing well-being where self, as in a hearth, is the central feature in the well-being experience, not in a selfish, deliberate way but in an uplifting, honourable way. Jeff's sense of freedom brings him close to himself. Jeff talks about well-being and embodiment being connected:

> When I've been more disembodied, I've felt less well. I've felt more anguished and more ailing, more incomplete. When I've come home to my body and accept the limitations of bodily experience instead of being idealistic, I feel more integrated, and more whole, and happier.

Jeff's experience of coming home to his body and of accepting his body and its experiences are foundational for his experience of well-being. He is open to the peacefulness of his unfolding world. He is open to discover aspects of himself that have lain dormant, leading him to being open to experiencing well-being.

Alan experiences this phenomenon when he pays close attention to his whole body, not in a superficial way but in a deep, sincere way. When Alan becomes attuned to his life and living within the context of marathon races, he experiences well-being. He experiences it in the free space that connects him with nature and when his body, mind, and soul became as one in an interchange with his world.

Mary Ann experiences a progression toward well-being that contains ups and downs along the way:

> When I started to do my inner work, like I call it, I was euphoric. I was really very, very excited about my new life. I felt wonderful. After two years of being euphoric, I finally started to see reality and I was at the cancer clinic and I started to cry, and the Dr. said "Oh, thank God." She said, "We were really getting worried about you." Now, I don't know what was behind all that. I'm not manic depressive. I was euphoric for two years. I just felt like I'd been let out of prison. I thought I was

> experiencing well-being but I had a long way to go. At least I was beginning the journey. I was doing things like massage therapy. It was after that, that I started to go through the grieving of losing the family circle. And I had to work through all that.

Mary Ann's experience of well-being involves euphoria which is a reaction to feeling as if she has been let out of prison after leaving her abusive relationship. She explicitly says, "The first wonderful feeling I had was breaking loose from the chains. I felt a sense of freedom." She finds out that euphoria, for her, is an initial experience of well-being on a journey toward a greater sense of well-being. However, the professionals do not understand that her feeling of euphoria is an aspect of her well-being journey. Her grieving experience follows this period of euphoria that is part of her well-being experience. Mary Ann comes to realize that well-being comes from inside when she experiences peace and contentment in her personal dwelling place. Mary Ann's feeling of freedom leads her to feeling empowered and to doing things for herself, thereby contributing to her feeling of being connected with the world. Her lived space, her personal self, reflects a felt harmony between her inner and outer worlds. She dwells in her world. She dwells in herself in her personal home. Here, she journeys toward experiencing well-being.

When Jeanette experiences this phenomenon, she feels "anchored," not in the sense of being stationary or chained but, instead, in responding effortlessly because she is rooted in intuition rather than in ego-driven thinking. When she responds effortlessly, she says she is experiencing "a sense of I am where I belong." She comes home to herself. Jeanette understands that when she feels anchored she experiences feelings of freedom rather than feelings of captivity; she experiences those feelings as well-being. Feeling whole and happy, together with feeling anchored within oneself,

introduces an aspect of completeness that seemingly shines inside the person like a jewel that waits silently to be discovered. The people I interviewed and the people whose stories are told in the literature describe this jewel as being at the core of their being, at the core of their lived experience of well-being.

Ann's experience of well-being is internal and its very nature reaches the far corners of the self where a precious jewel of well-being resides. The people in this study talk about this jewel of well-being arising out of love for self, others, and the world. Ann reflects on her nursing experience that speaks to possibilities for promoting others' well-being experiences. From this description, well-being can be seen in the human relationship:

> Look for that one good thing in that dirty old man who yells at people and throws things. Find out the one thing that he's passionate about and what he really likes, and make sure he's exposed to it. Everybody has something in life, crotchety as they can be. You know we've all seen them. I remember there was a woman who had beautiful long hair. She was the most awful, horrible woman in the world. She screamed at everybody. But no one ever went in and asked her why she was screaming. I spent about 20 minutes talking with her. I found out that in her youth she had won a beauty pageant. And so we talked about that. That's a memory that's happy for her. During her reign, she had long hair and she vowed she would never cut her hair again, and she never did. Two LPN's and a Care Aid one afternoon decided her hair was too matted, and cut it all off. Then they wondered why she was screaming. No one bothered getting to see who that person was. They knew she was the Cat Lady, that she had hundreds of cats. She had newspapers piled up in her house that you literally had to go through to go through (her house). She was one of the crazy ladies of the city. But no one bothered finding out underneath the craziness, who was there. Maybe it is asking someone their favourite colour and the next day dropping a green bow on their tray. But we just focus on the negative, negative, negative, negative. We're very judgmental about putting down when they are "violent, or dangerous, or crotchety". But do we ever put down smiling, pleasant, loves to…?

Although Ann's discussion is reflective of her past nursing experience and includes her thoughts about ways to positively promote well-being in others, her discussion points

to the core of the person who responds according to the way he or she is in relationship with others. The elderly lady whose hair was cut for practical reasons, demonstrates a distinct lack of well-being when her pride and joy, her hair, is taken away from her. According to Ann, cutting the woman's hair is akin to cutting out the core of her being. Ann highlights that the foundational aspect of well-being lies in our human connections and that these human connections are paramount in the nursing relationship. It requires that we find ways to relate to the person's life-interests to bring well-being into existence. A simple gesture such as showing interest in a person's favourite colour by merely giving the person something in that colour, shows that the nurse is genuinely interested in the uniqueness of the person. These actions include communicating people's life-interests to other caregivers to enhance their understanding of the lives of the people with whom they work. As human beings, we live in relationships even when those relationships exclude other people and, instead, are relationships with oneself, one's world such as with nature, or imaginative others. Human connections are the core of loving connections. Love, here, is not meant as romantic relationships. Instead, love is caring connections that unite people with the world.

Frost's (1995) poem, *Neither Out Far Nor In Deep*, is an expression of our connection with nature, our interconnection between the land and the sea. He portrays the image of our natural response to face the sea with our backs to the land. The overlap of our view of the sea as it approaches us and the land, sets our vision on the horizon that reflects our world, and our past, present, and future possibilities. The lived experience of well-being is expressed in our embrace of our world and in our past

experiences, our present lives, and the possibilities in our future. It is from these overlapping relationships and from the interchange that sustains these relationships that the lived experience of well-being arises while we are in these dwelling places that present as locales.

Dwelling in Locales

Heidegger (1993) brings clarity to the nature of home when he discusses dwelling in locales. He points not to the boundary around a space as limiting growth. Rather, he writes about a boundary as being the starting place for possibilities to come into being within locales. Locales derive from space and from the person dwelling in that space. Here, building takes place. Previously, Jeff tells us about accepting our boundaries in an open and free way and not ordering their restrictive presence. Jeff, too, is referring to boundaries being the starting place for possibilities.

Home can be the place in which we physically dwell in relationship with ourselves and others. Home also can be our bodily, emotional, spiritual, and social home where we live peacefully and contentedly. Mary Ann speaks of coming home to self as she comes to experience well-being through her connections with the sunrises. Bollnow (1961) writes about another perspective of home space when he writes that space "can be lost through disorder and can be restored through order" (p. 37). It is possible that the orderliness of home, wherever home may be, contributes to experiencing well-being. Nouwen (1986) states:

> Rootlessness cannot lead to joy any more than routine behaviour. Without a place to move from and refer to as the home from which we come, every movement can easily become a panicked flight leading nowhere. Rootlessness and goal-lessness are closely connected. People who have lost touch with their roots also tend to lose their sense of direction. This is quite understandable, since our roots offer us a time, place, and context in

> which to search for new possibilities. It is hard to search for your own way of being at home in the world when you have little or no memory of ever having felt at home. (p. 95)

Nouwen clarifies that orderliness needs to be grounded rather than strictly ruled. Being at home is a way to feel and be grounded. Well-being is experienced in one's dwelling in space that is home space where time, place, and context become the way toward achieving possibilities. Without ever having been in home space, a person's journey toward well-being becomes scattered and without order. Likewise, routine responses are lifeless responses that undermine the possibility of experiencing well-being. Instead, this phenomenon is grounded in home space that freely grows amidst a sense of direction.

The front page of *The Daily News, Kamloops*, included an article by Litt (2007), about a woman, Vuteva, and her family from Bulgaria. She and their two sons followed her husband to Canada in 2006 after he began work as the concertmaster for the local Symphony Orchestra in Kamloops, BC. Their decision to emigrate to Canada was not made without difficulty. This move meant an improved quality of life for the entire family, but it also meant that Vuteva would be unable to continue with her Bulgarian law firm to become a prosecutor. She is struggling to become accepted in her new land. "Accents and dialects shouldn't matter, but they do for a new immigrant and Vuteva knows that hers is another barrier toward acceptance. 'But I knew before coming here that I would have to start from zero' " Litt (p. A1). Meanwhile, as she dreams of practicing law in Canada, she volunteers at her sons' school. She describes her search for a new identity. Few people know that she has two Master's degrees and that, less than two years ago, she was close to becoming a prosecutor. Identity and

orientation are key barriers to Vuteva experiencing a full sense of well-being. She admits to positive aspects of this move and, alternately, she longs to regain her previous identity. "In the meantime, she waits, in a kind of limbo, for her life to begin again in Canada" (p. A2). She depicts a person who is lost and whose life has been placed on hold. She is trying to find her way. She does not describe a person who is experiencing a depth of well-being. Her home has been uprooted. Until she finds a way to set down new roots, her sense of well-being likely will be impacted. She is struggling to find or create a new identity where she can feel at home.

Crossing to the Other Shore

The movement of this journey is slowing as this research draws to a close. I have nearly crossed over the bridge that connects people's descriptions of their lived experiences of well-being to the shore that reflects the mystery of this experience. In some respects I realize that I can now face this new understanding with my back to the place from which I have come because the horizons of my understanding are reflected in the approaching shore. By dwelling in this conjoined space, I can embrace the horizons of the well-being experience and anticipate fostering the lived experience of well-being in my mental health nursing practice and in my teaching. Strangely, though, I feel as if I cannot entirely leave this locale of understanding for if I do it is possible that I could lose sight of this phenomenon. Perhaps this feeling exists for me because this present journey is not quite finished and, in reality, is an ongoing journey of discovery.

This phenomenological study is an exploration of the essential elements of well-being as they are revealed in people's descriptions of their experiences and in, for

example, poems, metaphors, stories, paintings, and film. These descriptions of well-being bring us close to understanding this experience; however the mystery of well-being remains. In the next chapter, I will once again return to the question: What is the nature of the lived experience of well-being?

CHAPTER 8: UNCOVERING THE MYSTERY OF WELL-BEING

This research aimed to uncover the lived experience of well-being, create a text describing it, and relate the implications of that description to nursing practice. I was drawn to study this phenomenon because of the frequently interchangeable use of the terms health, wellness, and well-being. Despite its importance to nursing, well-being is a phenomenon about which we lack a rich, common understanding. We do not clearly distinguish it from health and wellness. I was intrigued by the way well-being could be experienced outside of times of vibrant health, such as during illness. My own experience of well-being while seriously ill in hospital was of this nature. When I explored etymological definitions of well-being and related words, I began to see that although well-being is a lived experience that appears in a range of other experiences such as health and illness, it also has features of its own. The literature points toward these features but leaves well-being to be expressed in different ways. The elusiveness of well-being mirrors the elusive nature of the lived experience itself.

I lived the elusiveness of this experience as I searched for understanding by reading about it, by listening to the people I interviewed, and by writing and re-writing to evoke this phenomenon. I discovered that the stories of well-being that I heard and read concurred with my own; well-being can be experienced not only during times of health and peace-of-mind but, also, during illness and life difficulties. Well-being shows up within contrasts, experienced as lightness during difficult times or as vulnerability in close relationships. The people who were exemplars shared their stories of well-being with me, sometimes reviewing their memory books to reach back to experiences when they were children; yet, at the same time, they experienced well-

being in the present. Well-being, as they described it, sometimes was experienced as moments and sometimes was sustained across time. Poetry and literature, including original sources that drew me to the five exemplars, helped to point me toward this lived experience. Well-being was brought to light, too, when set against a backdrop of occasions when it did not occur.

By using phenomenology as the basis for my exploration of well-being, I have been able to uncover aspects of this experience as it occurs prereflectively. This uncovering that goes beyond the everydayness of our human lives, reveals our deep connection with the universe. My struggle to write about well-being in a descriptive text has been worthwhile. This work contributes to the literature on well-being which has not paid particular attention to this lived experience. In this chapter I bring the essential themes to light and anticipate what needs to follow from this work.

Bringing Essential Themes to Light

I did not find well-being in the science of body functioning or in the medicine of illness and recovery. Instead, by engaging in writing a description of it, I found well-being to be inherent in life and therefore lived. I discovered that coming to experience well-being arises from being open to its mystery in a space where we open to and embrace wonder of the moment and of our connection with life that is in and around us. The lived experience of well-being is in our dwelling and moving forward on the journey toward and within this space. It is coming home to self. In the experience of well-being, people lose themselves to a new way of dwelling and being. Nine thematic qualities emerged as being essential aspects of this phenomenon. Although essential themes emerged in this study, they are not prescriptive aspects of this experience that,

if poured into us, would yield well-being. Rather, they are themes that describe the ways that the people in this study experienced this phenomenon.

Seeing Differently

The metaphorical story of the river helps to show the lived experience of well-being. It is a journey of seeing differently and in coming to realize that difficulties or challenges in our lives can be ways toward well-being. As clouds hid the sky from the river's view, so too can we limit our experience of this phenomenon. Not until we change our perspective away from feeling like victims or from achieving particular goals, do we move toward well-being. It is a shift in view from a self-focused perspective to looking beyond ourselves.

Well-being is not found outside of us; instead, it is found deep inside at our very core. Jeff described feeling as part of the larger universe rather than solely as a victim of his wife's terminal illness. Well-being is being free to see and experience beyond obvious human qualities. The way toward well-being makes all the difference.

Letting Go to Embrace the Mystery of Well-Being

Well-being has transcendent qualities that are grounded in intimate relationships with self, others, and the world. It is not transcendence above. It is joining the collective world in a transcendent intimacy. When Ann was a child, she draped herself in a special piece of gold material and experienced well-being in her newfound Regal role. Childhood moments of well-being sustained her well-being as an adult. This phenomenon is a letting go of life difficulties to embrace the mystery of the well-being experience. It is not wholly forgetting about our struggles; it is moving beyond that place. It is letting go of everyday activities, duties, and obligations. The well-being

experience is an uncovering of all that smothers us in our everyday world. It is not merely uncovering as in being naked and vulnerable. It is embracing the uncovering of one's vulnerability to be open to breathing in synchrony with all that is around and about us. Well-being invites us to be open to the wonders within ourselves and within the universe, to be open to the mystery of well-being.

Meditation and mindfulness provide ways of letting go of confining experiences while bringing satisfying experiences into focus. Well-being is an expression of contrasts between letting go of disruptive perspectives, accepting ourselves and our place in the universe, and embracing relationships. It is not letting go, alone. It is letting go in order to enter a place of freedom through special dwelling spaces.

Dwelling Spaces

Dwelling in play space, creative space, nature's space, and spiritual space emerged as significant relational spaces in drawing people toward experiencing well-being. When we become one with our playing, singing, gardening, and spirituality, we reach beyond ourselves to experience well-being. This phenomenon involves losing ourselves for awhile to dwell away from everyday reality. Here, we lose ourselves to another place where we can see and experience beyond ourselves. Well-being involves movement beyond the immediate day-to-day world although, in reality, we remain in this world. We have, in essence, slipped into this other place where we live differently within the experience of well-being. All five people in this study spoke of this change of being that was connected with, yet different from, the way they saw and lived their

lives prior to experiencing this phenomenon. They did not lose sight of past, present, or future horizons of their lives.

While in play space, we move beyond the artificial confines of maturity to experience the innocence of playing. Adults tend to resist the letting go that takes children readily into the open and free world of play. Well-being is experienced when, as adults, we leave our immediate selves in our immediate world and find a new sense of self in the diverse world of play. At times, we are drawn through a portal into the past as we reminisce about playing as a child; here, we experience a sense of well-being. When we engage in creative expression, we experience moving into a whole new world that opens to us. Van Manen (2002) describes the experience of writing as "totally and self-forgetfully entering this text which opens up its own world" (p. 3). Writing is a creative activity. By being open to creative expression we become one with our creativity. Well-being arises out of this freeing experience. Nature, too, draws people into another world that allows us to become one with the earth and all that it puts forth. As we embrace the earth we come to notice nature's fine garden. Well-being is experienced in this space where objectivity and subjectivity merge and where our souls are nurtured. Similarly, when we set aside our everyday worlds to embrace our spirituality, we experience a whole new world that previously seemed hidden from view. Dwelling in spirituality is interwoven with dwelling in a variety of other spaces such as in nature. We experience well-being as we enter into deep human connections with the universe that fill our spirit and give us peace.

Ann, Alan, Jeff, Mary Ann, and Jeanette showed that in these dwelling spaces they are free to become themselves. Their experiences of dwelling in locales echo

Heidegger's (1993) discussion of locales that derive from dwelling in space. In locales they are free to be within the world. Here, the horizon of their past, present, and future sustains their lives. Instead of building in order to dwell, Ann, Alan, Jeff, Mary Ann, and Jeanette dwelled in order to build. Dwelling and then building evoked flourishing which is at the heart of their well-being experiences.

Sustaining Nature of Rhythmic Flow

We experience well-being as being rhythmic as in flowing forward. This calm, gentle movement has a sustaining quality that holds us up through all manner of life difficulties and challenges. By recognizing the sustaining aspect of well-being we realize we will survive regardless of our concerns. This flow becomes nurturing and draws our attention inside, away from the happenings in the world. At the same time this flow connects us with the universe where we join together within life's struggles. We are nurtured; our souls are nurtured. The opposite of experiencing well-being is experiencing soul loss as if one is a no-thing where flow all but ceases. Mary Ann described a time when her internal flame was barely flickering; well-being, for her, was hardly present. However, the possibility of experiencing well-being existed even during those times. Mary Ann showed the world that when her internal flame was glowing brightly, she appeared as a blooming rose.

Balanced Tension

Well-being is coming to a place of peace and contentment that is calming and soothing but not without enough tension to yield balance and harmony. We experience harmonious balance in dwelling spaces that invite us to wonder, rather than being caught up solely in the everyday rush of the world. Balanced tension arises in the space

of difference between dwelling spaces of well-being and living in the day-to-day world with its constant demands. Here, well-being flourishes in a giving and receiving, back and forth between people, the world, and within self. Self-care plays a significant role in our well-being experiences. Giving and receiving is a connecting aspect of well-being that has sustaining qualities. It contains an element of acceptance. In that place it becomes a freeing process that allows well-being to surface. Ann's time in her friendship garden shows the freeing nature of giving and receiving. She gave herself to others by creating and dwelling in this peaceful place and, in return, experienced well-being that supported her to live well through her terminal illness.

Rhythmic Interchange in the Space of Difference

In this study, well-being was revealed in all manner of circumstances. Perhaps because of the apparent contrast, this phenomenon is highlighted when we encounter difficulties in our lives. It is experienced in a rhythmic interchange where harmony and balance are fostered in spaces of tension. However, when we are fully relaxed without engaging in the immense universe or when we are caught up in the tensions of everyday life, well-being eludes us. It is as if the combination of tension and harmonious balance allow for a rhythmic interchange. This interchange occurs within a conjoined space of difference within the world where we come to embrace the mystery of well-being. This space is one of overlapping relationships that are sustained through an interchange that resembles breathing.

The well-being experience is a deeply woven masterpiece, where self and world become one. The continuous interchange between us and our world reflects a dance of mutuality that underlies well-being. It is a time of soulful connecting. Jeff's soulful

connection with nature enabled him to breathe, as in coming to experience well-being during a time of deep despair. This breathing interchange connects us with the universe in an interweaving that reflects our turning inward and turning outward. It is never still. Rather, it requires a personal drive to exist that is open and free instead of being purposeful. It goes to the depth of human spiritual experience where possibilities abound.

Fluctuating Nature of Well-Being

The experience of well-being does not achieve a steady state. It fluctuates over time. This movement reflects our changing perspectives that are combined with the rhythmic flow of this phenomenon. Sometimes we re-experience well-being by bringing memories forward into the present. At other times we focus on our present place in the world or on future possibilities of experiencing this phenomenon. Alan described times of immense well-being when he engaged in mindful thinking. In contrast, when he focused on life goals his experience of well-being faded. All the while that our perspectives shift and as we become attuned to letting go of confining experiences and entering a place of freedom, our experiences of well-being also fluctuate. As we gradually become more and more in tune with the essential qualities of this phenomenon, the changing aspect of our journey reflects a fluid stability.

Quietude of Voice

We come to experience a newfound voice within our well-being experiences. Voice, here, is not meant as vocal tone, pitch, or volume. It is a strength that allows us to enter into and speak of our well-being. It is strong, yet calm. I found that well-being is expressed deep within the self. Well-being is present in living, like a glowing ember

or a flickering jewel at the heart of the person. Well-being is not still as in being lifeless. Well-being is still as in being thoughtful and as having soulful strength that is mirrored in the quietude of our voices.

The men and women in this study described their confident new voices that reflected a quiet confidence in themselves. Jeanette's voice shifted from being self-focused, to being humble and focused on joining a circle of people in raising each other toward experiencing well-being. Some of the people found a very different voice compared with their silent voices of the past, while others moved toward adopting a quiet strength that previously was missing. This change reflected their movement toward coming to know themselves differently.

Becoming Oriented Toward a New Identity

We come to know ourselves in new ways. Sometimes we gradually build on our knowledge of ourselves, whereas at other times we embrace a whole new identity. Sometimes our well-being journeys require deep reflection of and reorientation to who we were, are, and have become. This shift is gradual. It can be painless or it can be gut-wrenching. Mary Ann's journey reflects the latter. She moved from identifying as a victim to seeing herself as a person with all manner of possibilities. Mary Ann dwelled in her world in order to build her new identity. Heidegger's (1993) discussion of dwelling in order to build reflects Mary Ann's journey toward experiencing well-being. Regardless of the degree of emotional pain we experience, our journeys toward well-being lead to the same place, toward this shared phenomenon. Through our well-being journeys we come home to ourselves.

Anticipating What is to Come

The experience of well-being cannot be captured or pinned down. The essential themes discussed in this chapter provide a way to view this elusive phenomenon and to show what needs to be present for well-being to exist. This research began as an exploration of the surface of the lived experience of this phenomenon and gradually dipped into the embodied nature of this experience. The rhythm of well-being shows up in the rhythm of this writing. As I entered, dropped away from, and re-entered the hermeneutic circle of understanding, I became increasingly aware of human wholeness that underlies this experience.

The results of this research are one aspect of the experience of well-being with potential for subsequent research about this lived experience to add to this description. Future studies will fill out the understanding of this phenomenon instead of pinning it down in a final explanation. Well-being is a human possibility that could be explored across contexts to show the breadth of this experience. In particular, it would be important to continue to give voice to the place of well-being within health and illness and, therefore, within nursing practice. Understanding nurses' well-being experiences would be a crucial step in understanding the conjoined space within nursing relationships. I agree with Rodney, Doan, Storch, and Varcoe (2006) who write that, "nurses in all facets of the profession . . . need more opportunity to reflect on their practice, on the quality of their interactions with others and on the resources they need to maintain their own well-being" (p. 27). This research gives beginning voice to the experience of well-being and brings specific attention to this experience for clients as well as for nurses. The aim of the nursing relationship and of people's dance between

turning inward and outward toward experiencing well-being is, as Olthuis (1997) states, "to allow contact with difference to move, enhance, and change us as we become ourselves more fully" (p. 147). In staying true to van Manen's (1997) six activities of phenomenological research, it is important to place this research within the context of practice to give this research a practical place within nursing.

CHAPTER 9: RELATIONAL NURSING:

TOWARD THE EXPERIENCE OF WELL-BEING

I questioned early in my writing: What can this research do with us? What can this research do with nursing? Van Manen (1997) stated that phenomenology includes "maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon" (p. 31). In this chapter the results of this research will be woven into nursing practice. Included in this chapter will be a discussion of fostering the well-being experience within the nursing relationship.

Well-Being: A Centring Experience

I discovered in this research that well-being is a significant life experience. Although this study is not about specific steps that nurses can take to influence people's well-being, the results of this research can be applied to nursing practice. It is important, then, for nurses to know about and understand this human phenomenon and how at times we can get in the way of people experiencing well-being.

It was shown in this research that well-being is not achieved by following a list of activities as can be found in the wellness or illness prevention literature. Likewise, well-being is not experienced by forcing its occurrence, by purposely setting out to bring about this phenomenon, or by merely letting go of life difficulties. Many of the people interviewed described a disruption of well-being when they focused on their difficulties or were self-focused in an egotistical way, or when they were in a precarious balance where they experienced disruptive tension. Nurses who push the achievement of well-being as an agenda or direct people to forget about their troubles may very well promote a precarious balance that is far removed from well-being.

The men and women in this study described the sustaining nature of well-being as reaching to their souls. This sustaining nature came out of dwelling in and then building from this dwelling place. It is as if dwelling, itself, leads to flourishing. At the heart of the well-being experience, people come to be at home within themselves. It was evident in this study that well-being is an actual experience, although it is an elusive phenomenon. This elusive aspect can get in the way of understanding well-being and in fostering its occurrence. However, ignoring its existence can result in ignoring a vital aspect of living fully. This study highlights ways of recognizing and, therefore, paying attention to the well-being experience as being an essential aspect of health care.

Fostering the Well-Being Experience in Others

Each of the people I interviewed described dwelling with people and nurturing this dwelling within locales that unite people within the world. This description points toward the nursing relationship that unites nurses with the people they serve. This perspective begs the question: If we are to dwell in order to build, as Heidegger (1993) describes, how might we be with people in nursing to nurture their individual well-being? The present challenges and changes in health care put at risk nurses' opportunities to be with people in ways that support their well-being experiences.

Nursing is about helping people build a home, as distinguished from building the skeleton of a house. Nursing involves fostering people's sense of orientation in their home spaces, thereby contributing to their experiences of well-being. Being orientated is in reference to being oriented toward a sense of home rather than being directionless. Being oriented has settling features that enable people to live through

challenges and changes that are part of their well-being journeys. Merely living in the skeleton of a house without the nurturing features of home promotes living as a no-thing.

Within the nursing relationship, nurses can foster people's connections with their outside world and with their inner selves. Some theorists of nursing have attempted to capture this relationship in various ways. Watson's (1999) theory of Transpersonal Caring in nursing recognizes soul's energy as having a place in one's "inner healing journey toward wholeness" (p. 150). Parse's (1992) Human Becoming theory of nursing supports people's connections with themselves and with all that is in the world. The nurse becomes truly present within a rhythmic relationship with each person toward what is possible (Parse, 1997). Newman's (1994) nursing theory of Expanding Consciousness presents a rhythmic aspect of health and illness. In Newman's theory, people discover new ways of understanding themselves and their worlds, and of finding meaning in their lives. This rhythmic nursing relationship is expressed in patterns of knowing for clients and their families (Newman).

Related to this research, the nursing role includes supporting people toward embracing the mysteries of life. It is not the finding of the mystery that leads to well-being. Embracing the journey and adventure toward seeing and experiencing themselves in their worlds differently, underlies this phenomenon. A 20th century lament has been to find oneself. Perhaps a 21st century accomplishment will be to come home to oneself. Interconnectedness between nurses and clients fosters the experience of well-being which underlies all facets of nursing practice. Nursing is about finding ways to take up the call to be in relationship with people such that they

are free to fly amidst the tensions of life. This relationship is an ethical one that calls us to bring it alive in nursing practice.

Ethical Nursing Practice

The strong thread of human relations weaves its way through the lived experience of well-being. Nursing is a relational profession (Benner, 2000; Gadow, 1999). Bergum and Dossetor (2005) focus on the nursing relationship when they describe ethical moments in practice. Nurses dwell in relationship with other nurses and with clients, families, and the entire health care team. Without these human connections, nursing would lose its essential human quality.

Conjoined Space in Nursing

The nursing relationship takes place in a conjoined space that is an expression of being with and dialoguing with another. Packard's (2004) dissertation on being-with in the relationship between nursing students and their teacher, describes being with another that involves "soul space" (p. 164) in which people come together in community and in a special friendship that is comforting. Being-with is experienced as an opening, similar to the freedom experienced in this research on well-being when people dwell in a conjoined space of difference. Packard's research reveals, too, the dimension of "eternal echoes" (p. 194) that resembles the horizons of past, present, and future, and rhythmicity that surfaced in this research on well-being. The phenomenon of being-with holds promise as a way toward which nurses can support people on their well-being journeys.

A conjoined space is a nurturing space within the nurse-client relationship that offers an invitation to mutual engagement. It is also a space within learning

environments where nursing students and their teachers join in mutual engagement to support each other and to learn ways to support the people they serve. Gadow (1999) refers to a "relational narrative" (p. 65) as an intervention that "embodies intersubjectivity" (p. 65). The dialogic space nurtures the embodiment of human life (Taylor, 1993). Bergum and Dossetor (2005) point out that "embodiment is found and experienced in relationship" (p. 147). Human connections are expressions of space for each other in a zone of equality (Bergum & Dossetor). Our humanity, a common link between all humans regardless of role or expertise, levels the ground upon which we come to relate. The well-being experience honours differences and the shared threads of relationships. In nursing, those relationships underlie clients' experiences of well-being within health and illness.

This research supports that well-being experiences set in motion the very possibility for people to experience health and illness in new, potentially life-enhancing ways, whether or not their health improves, stays steady, or fades away in dying and death. The shared relationship between nurses and clients contains the possibility for the promotion of people's orientation and identification and, thus, people's well-being experiences. The conjoined space between people, especially in the nursing relationship, presents a vital connection that fosters this phenomenon. Such a relationship brings humans together in face-to-face relationships.

Face-to-Face

It became evident in this study that connecting with another person face-to-face can detract from or promote one's experience of well-being. Olthuis (1977) proposed that the gaze of another can position a person as "hostage" (p. 136). Alternately, a

person's experience of well-being can be nurtured by soulful connections. Face-to-face with another human being in the context of connecting with rather than gazing at others, brings humans in touch with the shared nature of humanity. Giving and receiving within this human relationship is an expression of our moral responsibility for the other as well as for ourselves (Olthuis, 1977). The possibility of experiencing wholeness is in one's relationship with others rather than solely in one's relationship with oneself (Levinas, 1989).

The experience of well-being shows up in human relationships that honour both the self and others where the self is not in a position of being hostage to the other. The men and women in this research described being in relationships of mutuality where being for another is as important as being for oneself. Olthuis (1997) describes this receptive relationship as "power-with and the dance of mutual empowerment" (p. 146). These concepts echo in Hartrick's (1997) discussion of relational capacity when she says, "Mutuality and synchrony acknowledge both the rhythms of dialogue and of silence" (p. 526). Being with the other in silence is part of the dialogic space. Likewise, engaging in dialogue with the other is part of the dialogic space. Elkins (1996), tells us:

> Speaking is like making ripples in a pool of water, and a face is like the wall that sends the ripples back. If we speak forcefully, we send waves out toward the other face, and in a moment we can expect to feel the response. Faces move in this way even when they are not speaking. (p. 167)

When we speak to the other, the effects of what we say are felt inside us as a response to the other's response. Both silence and dialogue are expressions of interconnectedness between humans and are reflected as harmonious balance.

The experience of well-being is fostered in this zone where balance and harmony emerge. Out of this fine balance, human relationships thrive. We come face-to-face with the other and engage with the other as if he or she were our own selves. Yet, what of the person without a face as we know a face to be, or with a disfigured face? There is more to the human being than the face of the person. Well-being is connecting with the soul of the person together with connecting with the soul of oneself. This soulful connection is foundational within the nursing relationship. Elkins (1996) highlights this point when he refers to art and states, "The painted face . . . is a window on the soul" (p. 184). Rather than face-to-face encounters with others that bring us into close mutual relationships, well-being is expressed as harmony between souls. This harmony is experienced in the interplay of difference in art and in real life encounters.

Taylor's (2002) story of Mary whose caregivers and family joined together to help her experience the rain, and the stories of the people I interviewed, tell of relational space where harmony and, thus, well-being are experienced. Bergum and Dossetor (2005) offer that "relational space . . . [is] where opposites cease" (p. 153). It is a dynamic space in which we simultaneously experience the various extremes and similarities within the world. In this sense, differences show up as harmony. Differences blend with similarities, much like light and dark come together. Colour, and black and white are woven together to form a whole picture. The experience of well-being is an expression of this coming together of contrasts and points toward paying attention to the place of contrasts within nursing practice. Heraclitus' (McKirahan, 1994) view of opposites that promote the existence of a tension supports a

balance between opposites. He highlights the dynamic interplay of similarities and differences that yield rhythm and music that emerge from this tension. Opposites that pull apart and remain distinct do not yield the pleasing music of an embodied whole. Opposites that come together as a harmonious balance become an expression of the soothing music of the soul.

Olthuis (1997) describes an interplay in our relationships where "the dance between staying with one's self and reaching out is the interplay of difference that is life itself" (p. 147). We as humans are unique and different from each other. This uniqueness and difference shows up in nursing relationships where we express our differences in mutual relationships. This interplay of difference presents as overlapping boundaries between people in the nursing relationship and in people's relationships with themselves, others, and the world. Dialogic space exists within these overlapping boundaries of intersubjectivity (Taylor, 2002) where well-being resides in a power-with relationship with the other (Olthuis, 1997) as people journey toward seeing and experiencing themselves anew. As nurses, we can take the lead in fostering mutual relationships that enable people's voices to be heard.

The five people who are exemplars in this study describe well-being as residing in the mutual interplay of difference that shows up as a soulful connectedness between self, others, and the world. Smith (1994) says that "identity means nothing without a set of relations" (p. 129) that "border on and open onto the space of an Other whose existence contains part of the story of our shared future" (p. 130). Human connections foster the intersubjectivity of the experience of well-being for everyone in the nursing relationship.

Well-being shows itself within this conjoined space where a natural rhythmic interchange takes place that resembles the interchange in breathing—an essential aspect of life. In nursing we breathe on our own and we breathe in relationship with others and the world. The nursing relationship sustains this rhythmic human breathing. The rhythmicity of this interchange can be expressed as a dance. Nursing involves joining people in this rhythmic interchange where nurses and those with whom they are in relationship, flourish as they learn how to build their lives more fully.

Nursing clients toward experiencing well-being includes joining clients. Here, nurses enter into and dwell in rhythmic relationship with clients. The experience of well-being is upheld within this rhythmic relationship that, in a health care context, involves more than the client, more than the family, and more than the outward actions of caring for a person. From clients' perspectives, this rhythmic relationship is "a harmonious fitting together and walking in concert with the nurse toward the clients' preferred future" (Wallace & Appleton, 1995, p. 288). When the nurse, client, family, and community are in concert with one-another, they join together toward expressions of and experiences of well-being. A relational rhythm and, ultimately, the breathing of well-being are sustained within the conjoined space of relationships. As noted in Bergum and Dossetor (2005), "to act in an engaged way, both caregivers and recipients of care are whole beings, both self-interested and other-focussed" (p. 111). In this relational space, caregivers and recipients of care, each grow and change and come to see themselves and their worlds in new ways.

Nursing, as a relational profession, is about nursing the whole person; however, nursing's busy work tends to flatten the human nature of a person into a two-

dimensional being. A participant in the Relational Ethics Research Project described by Bergum and Dossetor (2005), explained that she came "to know a patient, as a person, during her care of him during one evening shift . . . as the evening wore on, the man became more three-dimensional to her, more of a whole person, rather than only a man with a high-grade tumour" (p. 111). The relational experience of this nurse is an expression of the possibility of both this man and nurse experiencing well-being during their journey together in a caring, relational, and nurturing space. I invite all nurses to see everyone as being three-dimensional. This change in perspective could make a significant difference in the way nurses dwell with people over the course of their well-being journeys.

Dance of Mutuality

Giving and receiving encompass the mutual relationship in nursing. This relationship is not meant, here, as the giving and receiving of tangible and obvious gifts. This interchange is a giving of oneself as one human in relationship with another and a receiving of the other person. Relational ethics lies at the bedrock of the well-being experience within nursing practice and within health care as a whole. Bergum and Dossetor (2005) propose that a circular notion of giving and receiving becomes a resource that "revives heart and soul" (p. 116). The well-being experience is a reflection of the revived heart and soul where people can tap into the life force within themselves. People engage, here, in the fine balance of breathing as experienced in well-being. The rhythmic breathing interchange connects one's outer world to one's inner world. Breathing, as with well-being, brings differences together. The harmony of this dance shows up as a balanced interplay of differences.

This descriptive research points toward ways that the nursing relationship plays a significant role in nurturing people's well-being experiences. The interrelationship between nurses and those in their care occurs in a space where both the nurse and client, including the family and community, are on similar journeys toward well-being. We cannot forget that nurses, too, are challenged to experience being at home within themselves. This experience, then, is not focused on one or another person in the relationship. As a human experience, it is shared and shaped by nurses and by those with whom nurses enter into relationship.

The Well-Being of Nurses

When we separate our professional nursing from that of nurses' everyday experiences, we limit the possibility of clients and nurses experiencing well-being. It is a fine balance to uphold the moral position of placing the other's interests ahead of one's own interests (Tarlier, 2004) and, at the same time, to embrace our own well-being. In relational space, the experience of well-being is honoured for all humans. If we ignore caring for ourselves, not only would we fall away from experiencing well-being but, also, our relationship with the other and, therefore, others' experiences of well-being would be undermined. Paying attention to nurses' own well-being experiences, then, does not become a selfish endeavour. Instead, fostering nurses' well-being experiences, whether the nurses are graduates or students, is a professional nursing response that, in turn, nurtures clients' well-being experiences. This nursing responsibility cannot be ignored.

As I reflect on my journey through this research, I find my thoughts returning to the rhythm of well-being as it is expressed in nature's rhythms. The nursing

relationship is an expression of the rhythm of well-being. The rhythmicity in this relationship sustains the human interchange between the nurse and the client. This relationship exists in a conjoined space with the other in a shared spiritual place. Giving and receiving, back and forth between nurses and clients, sustains the well-being experience for the nurse and the client. Detaching from this relationship elicits a lack of well-being for clients, families, and others and, on the part of the nurse, may contribute to experiencing burnout (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) displayed in a range of physical and/or mental concerns.

In present times, nursing is challenged to foster the nursing relationship in the midst of hectic shifts and work pressures that pull nurses far away from experiencing well-being. I encourage nurses to join me in reclaiming the well-being experience and in fostering this lived experience in everyone, regardless of health care service demands. Indeed, well-being is an everyday way of being; our challenge is to nurture its growth. To do so may very well diminish or, possibly, circumvent the negative effects of limited health care services and place home back into nursing practice and into people's lives amidst this tension. This research is an invitation to join me in this 21st century journey.

Embarking on a Journey Toward Well-Being

It is a slow process for nurses and others to come to see the world differently. As we gradually open ourselves to the well-being experience, our eyes open and we begin to see ourselves and the world differently. It is a subtle seeing at first which blossoms into a change in perspective that affects all that we do. Instead of people

focusing on the clouds of the world, nurses can re-focus their own and other's seeing on their inner being connected with the universe.

The busyness of our nursing world and limited resources are straining both the system and the people who work in and receive health care. I am drawn to wonder how very different the nursing world would be if we were to weave the living of well-being into all that we do and say and are. When I pause to contemplate this possibility, I am brought back to the ways that the people in this study came to embrace the essence of well-being. Their dwelling in particular spaces moved them along their well-being journeys. By focusing our attention on fostering the play experience for nurses and others, we could once again experience the freedom of play. This newfound freedom could make a significant difference in times of health and illness when one's playful spirit sustains a person to experience well-being in the present, with a view to past and future horizons. As nurses, we can nurture a playful spirit in people by planting a seed of play in our way of being with others. Nurses, who have forgotten how to play, potentially could interfere with the well-being of others. Nurses' well-being also needs attention.

The harmony that emerges in play appears when engaging in creative expression, dwelling in nature, and embracing spirituality, where one becomes mindful within these well-being spaces. In nursing, we can support people in their creative expression by following their lead toward aspects of creativity to which they are drawn. The well-being experience is pivotal to living well, therefore raising the value of creative expression within nursing. Let us acknowledge the value of such an endeavour and assist people to bring their creativity alive.

Nature, too, provides all manner of possibilities for people to experience well-being. Dwelling in nature brings a person in touch with the immense universe. If we were to bring nature and health care together, it could open people to experience the wonders of the universe that become reflected in them. By connecting deeply with nature, people are able to transfer that connection to a deep relationship with self and, in turn, to flourish as a reflection of nature's flourishing.

Some people embrace their spirituality through engaging in the arts or in play, or while communing in nature. People's spiritual experiences are fostered in various dwelling spaces, including being in reverent relationship with themselves or with a greater power than themselves. By promoting people's deep connections with their spirituality and, thus, with the universe, the well-being experience could come to life. Here, in spiritual space, people come to a place of wonder about their relationship with the universe. Spiritual experiences provide occasions for pausing to wonder. Health care practices, in particular nursing practice, are embedded in the cycles of life that sustain our being on this earth. When we ignore people's spiritual experiences, including our own, we inadvertently undermine the well-being experience.

Out of this research comes an understanding that when engaging in play and creative expression, communing with nature and being present to one's spirituality, people experience coming home. The nursing role includes supporting people and being open to people on their well-being journeys. Well-being is experienced by entering and dwelling in these spaces and becoming in tune with one's inner and outer worlds, all the while focusing on other than well-being.

The human landscape in all its beauty becomes the experience of well-being as expressed in the music of the soul in relationship with self, others, and the world. Levinas (1989), in clarifying Buber's discussion of being, points out that it is not through knowledge that we truly know ourselves. Instead, it is through embracing the depth of human experience, such as painful experiences, that we come to know ourselves. This embrace is dialogic; we communicate with human experiences themselves. Here, we experience a sense of orientation and identity that underlies the experience of well-being.

The men and women in this study experienced well-being when they came home to themselves, similar to Aoki's (1986) discussion of identification in the conjoined space between East and West. Coming home to self evokes orientation and knowing oneself more fully. The experience of well-being shows up when we dwell in a space of difference between our origin and our destination to embrace a new identity that is a way of becoming (Aoki, 1986). Barring one's past horizon from present and future horizons does not foster well-being. Well-being flourishes when a person dwells on the metaphorical bridge that gathers (Heidegger, 1993) one's horizons together. A person's orientation and identity rely on dwelling in this conjoined space that is home.

We could support people in recalling and creating new memories of home, a nursing response that is not time-consuming. This nursing response means that the nurse and the people the nurse serves become open and reflective. Nursing from this perspective requires far more than management of technology or a solitary focus on skills to survive in the fast-paced health care world. It would take willingness for us to

adopt a new perspective of being in relationship with ourselves and others to the extent that we could foster people's journeys, including our own journeys, toward coming home to self.

When I reflect on mental health nursing, I am reminded of clients with whom I have worked and who were struggling with mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, grief, or post traumatic stress. They were searching for ways to regain stability in their lives. Frequently, they talked about feeling out-of-control as if they were no longer grounded in life. They had lost their way and in so doing, had lost their identity. They no longer felt oriented and they no longer felt at home within their locales or within themselves. Nursing these clients required guiding them to become oriented and to find or regain their identity. Liaschenko (1994) writes that "to be home is also to be the agent of your own life" (p. 22). Mental health nursing presents an example of nursing's role in fostering people's autonomy and agency such that they can find their way back home to self.

With health care literally moving into the home, "the home as well as the school and workplace will no longer be separate domains where the agency of the dwellers predominates" (Liaschenko, 1994, p. 23). In the fast-paced world of health care that has limited resources, it may be timely for nursing to step forward to place emphasis on dwelling in locales rather than watching in silence as the dwellers lose their health care homes or their internal homes to the control of others and to institutions. Heidegger (1993) writes about the connection between dwelling and saving: "To save properly means to set something free into its own essence" (p. 352). Nouwen's (1986) writing also is an expression of setting humans free to fly. He writes

about Jean Vanier's response to working with people with mental and physical challenges:

> When Jean Vanier speaks about that intimate place, he often stretches out his arm and cups his hand as if it holds a small, wounded bird. He asks: "What will happen if I open my hand fully?" We say: "The bird will try to flutter its wings, and it will fall and die." Then he asks again: "But what will happen if I close my hand?" We say: "The bird will be crushed and die." Then he smiles and says: "An intimate place is like my cupped hand, neither totally open nor totally closed. It is the space where growth can take place." (Nouwen, p. 34)

Vanier (Nouwen) is describing dwelling in the sense that it sets a person free to experience well-being. Vanier's (Nouwen) experience resembles my experience of feeling free to fly and it also reflects the freedom of well-being experienced by the people in this study. Their well-being experiences did not tie them down to their circumstances. Instead, the men and women embraced the freedom to fly and, indeed, they flew amidst their varied experiences. Unlike the bird in Angelou's (1994) poem that flew freely but did not sing of freedom, when the people in this study experienced well-being, they flew in harmony with life's tensions. In this research, dwelling shows up as living and breathing, as in flourishing within one's lived space. Dwelling is flourishing within the circumstances, within the tensions of one's life. Well-being is coming home to self in a self-forgetful way, in the free space where life unfolds.

Nursing is about fostering home that is more than a building or structure. Home in nursing is at the core of one's life. We are challenged then to embrace home in nursing beyond the various settings of hospital, clinics, and homecare activities that occur in one's own home. Nurses would do well to foster people's dwelling in lived space wherever home may be. Nursing is about engaging with others as they come to

embrace dwelling and building. The nexus of well-being occurs as an interchange that promotes people's flourishing in all life circumstances.

An interchange in nursing opens toward the self. This approach to nursing is a mental health concern that transects all areas of nursing practice. Let us join toward an interchange between nurses and between nurses and others. It can be challenging to engage in building that unfolds from dwelling because in our fast-paced world quick results would seem to come from building first. However, Heidegger's (1993) words stand tall within the challenges in health care today where dwelling is easily pushed into the background and, at times, where building, too, is silenced or focused on building structures instead of homes. I offer that orientation and identity mean nothing without relationships. My well-being is shared with that of the other in a mutual relationship. Wallace and Appleton's (1995) research on the promotion of well-being identifies that the nurse-client relationship is significant in one's experience of well-being when the "nurse and client emerge from the reciprocal sensing, sharing and protecting from harm and develop a synchronicity referred to as being in tune" (p. 288).

The appeal, then, is to question ways that we can nurse differently in order to foster the lived experience of well-being. The appeal in this 21st century is to be in relationship with people and with technology (Heidegger, 1993) and not forfeit dwelling within health care in an attempt to control or otherwise limit health care services. If we lose our ability to dwell in this tensioned space, it is quite possible we will lose our ability to experience well-being which, in turn, will undermine the very core of health care and nursing practice.

Conclusion

Shared wholeness arises from the depths of the human condition, from the depths of the human soul. Nursing relationships that tap into this soulful experience of well-being are expressions of a shared human connection in a conjoined space of well-being. Reflecting on the stories of the men and women I interviewed, leads me to an understanding of dwelling in locales and being in relational space in becoming one within the experience of well-being. Casey (1997) writes "indeed, the well-being of reposeful residing is at home in all the places, actual or virtual in which imaginary and remembering flourish in felicitous space" (p. 295). Casey's words reframe the notion of residing, as being in residence in one's home, including in one's bodily home. Nursing is about nursing people in their dwelling spaces in their homes, wherever they are living. Let us put resident back into all dimensions of health care in order to foster flourishing and, therefore, well-being within nursing practice.

Although we now have a new understanding of how the men and women in this study experience well-being, the full mystery of this phenomenon still eludes us. As with any phenomenological study and particularly so for this elusive experience, there is much more to understand. This study has illuminated aspects of this experience and, in so doing, invites additional research that collectively will bring us closer to understanding this mystery. Phenomenology brings us as close as possible to understanding the experience and, at the same time, allows its mystery to remain. This study revealed that the experience of well-being lies on the journey through life events. To experience well-being is to be open to what is happening and to embrace the journey wherever it takes us. This research showed well-being as differing from health

and wellness. It is important for nurses, together with other health professionals and family members and friends of those we serve, to support people's well-being journeys including that of our own. Play, creative expression, dwelling in nature, and embracing our spirituality are significant in fostering well-being in our lives. The seeds of well-being can be planted and nurtured not only in the conjoined space between people but, also, in the conjoined space in which people dwell on their own. This soulful dwelling space is not meant to be captured. It is a space where we are self-forgetful about how to live and, instead, engage in living well.

Nursing is journeying with others as we embrace the rhythmic interplay of well-being that resides in relational space. It is time for the lived experience of well-being to be given voice alongside health, wellness, and illness. It is time for the lived experience of well-being to be given voice within nursing relationships. It is time for the lived experience of well-being to be honoured for nurses, clients, families, and communities as they dwell in locales that foster building toward experiencing well-being.

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APPENDICES

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate

A RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Hello:

I am a nurse and a student at the *University of Alberta*. My research is about people's experiences of well-being.

Your name has come to my attention during my beginning study of well-being. For this reason, I am inviting you to take part in this research.

If you would be interested in hearing more about this research, please contact me. I can be reached through one of the contact numbers or addresses below. I would be pleased to give you specific details about the role of participants. You would not be agreeing to participate in this study if you should contact me for more information about this research. You would need to sign a consent form to participate in this study.

Participants would be asked to describe their experiences of well-being. I will work with participants' stories to help me understand this experience.

Out of respect for your privacy, this letter will be the only contact I will make with you, unless you contact me.

I look forward to your reply,

Sincerely,

Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (c)

Appendix A

Sample Letter of Invitation

Date

Marion Healey-Ogden

Dear:

This short letter is meant to introduce myself and to let you know why I am contacting you.

I am a Registered Nurse and a PhD student in Nursing at the University of Alberta.

With great interest, I read your autobiography that was written in _____. Your eloquent description of your experiences reflects my present research about the lived experience of well-being. Thank-you for adding to my understanding of this concept. The experience of well-being is not well-described in the literature; therefore, I was very pleased to see your autobiography show many aspects of this experience. In particular, I am drawn to the depth to which you clearly portray your experience of well-being.

Please see the attached invitation to participate in my research so that I might further understand your experience of well-being. If you decide to participate, I can make a variety of accommodations in order to complete an interview from a distance.

Sincerely,

Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (candidate)

Appendix C

Letter of Information for Participants

The Lived Experience of Well-Being

Principle Investigator: Dr. Wendy Austin

Co-Investigator: Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (candidate)

Background: The topic of well-being is frequently discussed in the media. Terms such as health, wellness, and well-being are used in similar ways. Few studies focus on the lived experience of well-being. This research potentially will uncover new ways of thinking about well-being, health, and quality of life.

Purpose: The intent of this study is to show the meaning of the experience of well-being. Therefore, this study could contribute to the way nurses assist patients to experience well-being.

Procedures:

Participating in this study will include:

a) one interview by telephone or in person. The interview will be about 1 to 2 hours, at a time and place that is convenient to you and to the researcher.
a) the possibility of discussing your story of well-being by e-mail.
b) the possibility of a brief follow-up discussion of about ½ hour.

During the procedure:

a) you will be asked to tell your story of well-being.
b) you would have the option of sharing your story of well-being in a variety of forms, such as written stories or poems, and pictures. You may be asked some questions about your story as it is presented in its various forms.
c) telephone and in-person interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. Hard copies will be kept of e-mail messages.
d) the interview will follow a conversational approach. Direct and indirect questions will be asked, such as:
   - Please, tell me about your personal experience of well-being.
   - What is it about your experience of well-being that stands out for you?

During the time the consent is being obtained and at any time during your participation in this research project, the co-researcher will answer any of your questions concerning the research project and the procedures.

Potential Benefits: The benefits to you of participating in this study include:

a) feeling good about talking about your experiences.
b) feeling good about writing your story of well-being.

This study could assist nurses in the way they work with patients.
The general public, too, could benefit from this research.

Potential Risks: The risk to you of participating in this study includes:

a) *feeling, for example, sad because of talking about your memories.*

Instructions:

a) *You should tell the researcher right away if you feel uncomfortable about any of the research questions or if you have any concerns about the study.*
b) *If you should feel troubled because of being part of this study, it is strongly encouraged that you seek assistance. You could see assistance from, for example, a counsellor, a personal healer, or your family doctor.*
c) *If you do not seek assistance for troubling feelings, those feelings could worsen.*
d) *No financial assistance will be available for you, should you seek assistance to help you deal with troubling feelings.*

Confidentiality: The following details are important for you to know about the confidentiality of your participation in this research:

a) All information will be held confidential except when codes of conduct or laws require reporting.
b) The information will be kept for at least five years after the study is done and then destroyed in a confidential manner.
c) The information will be kept in a locked case in the co-investigator's home office.
d) Your name or any other identifying information will not be attached to the information you gave.
e) If the story of your experience has previously been published, your name and experience cannot be counted on as being confidential.
f) You have the option of giving permission or refusing permission to have your name used in the results of this study.
g) Unless you give specific consent for your name to be used, your name never will be used when results of this study are presented or published.
h) Anything you give to or send to the researcher by mail or by e-mail could be used in this study. An e-mail discussion by way of telling your story cannot be counted on as being confidential. Every attempt will be made to ensure confidentiality of e-mail messages.
i) All of this information may be used in future studies, and in future writing and meetings. Future studies would require approval by Research Ethics Committees.
j) The results of this research may exclude information you give to the researcher.
k) Material from interviews or material you submit to the researcher will not be returned to you.
l) A typist may be asked to transfer recorded conversations to written form. The typist will be required to sign a confidentiality form.

Voluntary Participation:

a) You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.
b) You will have the right to decline discussion of any question or line of thought.
c) You will be informed right away if the results from this or any other study could change your decision to continue in the study.

The Lived Experience of Well-Being

Researcher's Termination of a Person's Participation in this Study: The researcher will stop the interview if you tell or show the researcher that you are unsure about being interviewed.

Reimbursement of Expenses: If interviews take place on the University of Alberta campus, you will be provided with parking coupons. When the study is complete, you will be able to obtain a summary of the results of this research.

Contact Names and Telephone Numbers:

Please contact any of the individuals identified below if you have any questions or concerns:

Kathy Kovac-Burns
Director, Research Office
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta
Telephone Number: 1-780-492-3768

Health Ethics Research Board (HREB)
Administrative Office
Telephone Number: 1-780-492-9724

Dr. Wendy Austin
Principal Investigator
Canada Research Chair
Associate Professor, Faculty of Nursing and The John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre
University of Alberta
Telephone Number: 1-780-492-2988

Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (candidate)
Co-investigator
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta
Home Telephone Number in Prince George, BC: 1-250-964-7559

Appendix D

Informed Consent Agreement

Tile of the Project: The Lived Experience of Well-Being Part 1: Researcher Information		
Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Austin, Canada Research Chair, Associate Professor **Affiliation:** Faculty of Nursing and The John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, University of Alberta **Contact Information:** Phone: (780) 492-2988, e-mail: wendy.austin@ualberta.ca		
Name of Co-investigator: Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (c) **Affiliation:** Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta **Contact Information:** Phone: (250) 964-7559, e-mail: healey2000@yahoo.com		
Part 2: Consent of Participant:		
	Yes	**No**
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?		
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet?		
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?		
Do you understand the potential harm to you if you should choose to ignore personal, negative responses to telling your story?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?		
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect the investigators' treatment of you.		
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?		
Do you give consent to use your name when results of this study are presented or published?		
Do you understand who will have access to your records/information?		
Part 3: Signatures:		
This study was explained to me by: _____ Date: _____		
I agree to take part in this study. Signature of Research Participant: _____ Printed Name: _____		
I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate. Researcher: _____ Printed Name: _____		
* A copy of this consent form must be given to the participant.		

Appendix E

Sample Letter and Informed Consent Agreement for Family of Participant #1

November 2, 2005

Marion Healey-Ogden

___(husband)___ and family

Dear ____ and family:

I am a nursing instructor at the College of New Caledonia and, thus, have known _____ for many years. You and I met in your home at the gathering that followed her death earlier this year. _____ will be dearly missed and the memory of her joyous approach to dying will live on.

My reason for writing this letter is to ask you for direction regarding research that I am doing as a PhD student at the University of Alberta (U of A). _____ kindly and eagerly consented to participate in my research on the *lived experience of well-being*. I interviewed her on August 31, 2004. Although in the information letter that I sent to _____, I had indicated that her name would be held confidential in presentations and publications of this research, following the interview, _____ requested that I use her real name. I indicated at that time that I did not have Ethics approval to agree to her request. As my research proceeded, I realized that if participants wanted to have their real names used in my work, honouring that choice would be a way to honour their experiences.

Therefore, I forwarded a request for this change to the Ethics Board at the U of A. In May of 2005, I received permission to give each participant a choice of whether or not he or she would like to have his or her real name used in my written work or presentations. Unfortunately, this approval occurred after _____ had passed away. The Ethics Board is aware that because I did not obtain _____'s request on tape, I will be asking for written permission from you, on behalf of your family, to use _____'s real name (first and/or last name) *in presentations and publications of this research.* Please feel free to give permission or decline permission for me to use her real name in this research. _____ was aware that because much of her story has already been published in _____ and elsewhere, it will not be fully possible to keep her experience confidential; however I will make every attempt to do so if you prefer that I do not use her real name in this research.

Attached is a permission form for you to sign according to your decision. Please return one

signed form to me via fax or regular mail, and keep the other form for your records. Thank-you very much for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you on behalf of your family.

Sincerely,

Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (candidate)

Title of Project:

The Lived Experience of Well-Being

Research Information:

Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Austin, Canada Research Chair, Associate Professor

Affiliation: Faculty of Nursing and The John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, University of Alberta

Contact Information: Phone: (780) 492-2988, email: wendy.austin@ualberta.ca

Name of Co-Investigator: Marion Healey-Ogden RN, PhD (c)

Affiliation: Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta

Contact Information: Phone: (250) 964-7559, e-mail: healey2000@yahoo.com

Consent of Spouse on behalf of family:

	Yes	No
Do you give consent for _____'s name to be used when results of this study are presented or published?		

Signature of _____'s spouse, _____:

_____ _____

Signature Printed Name

_____

Date